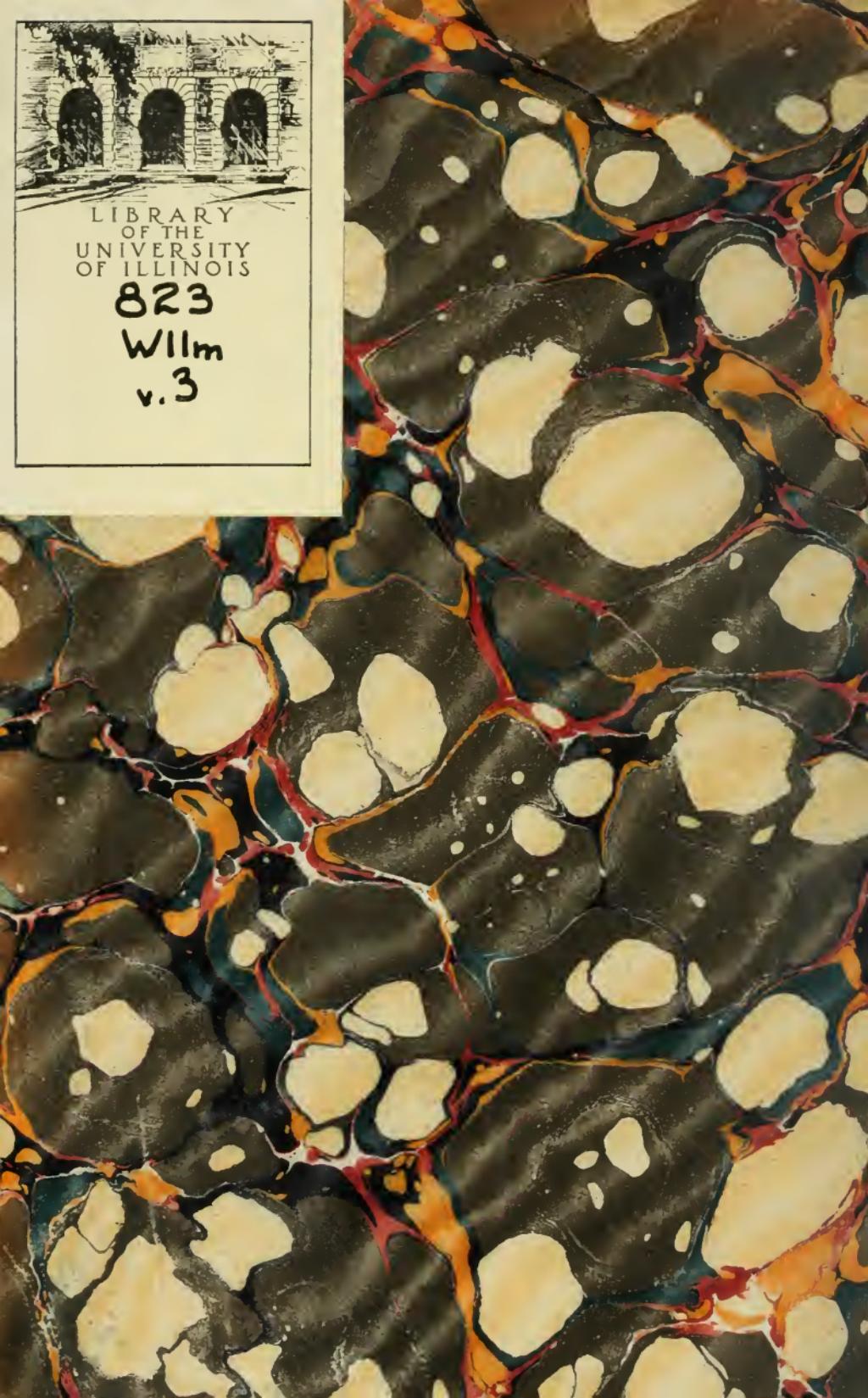


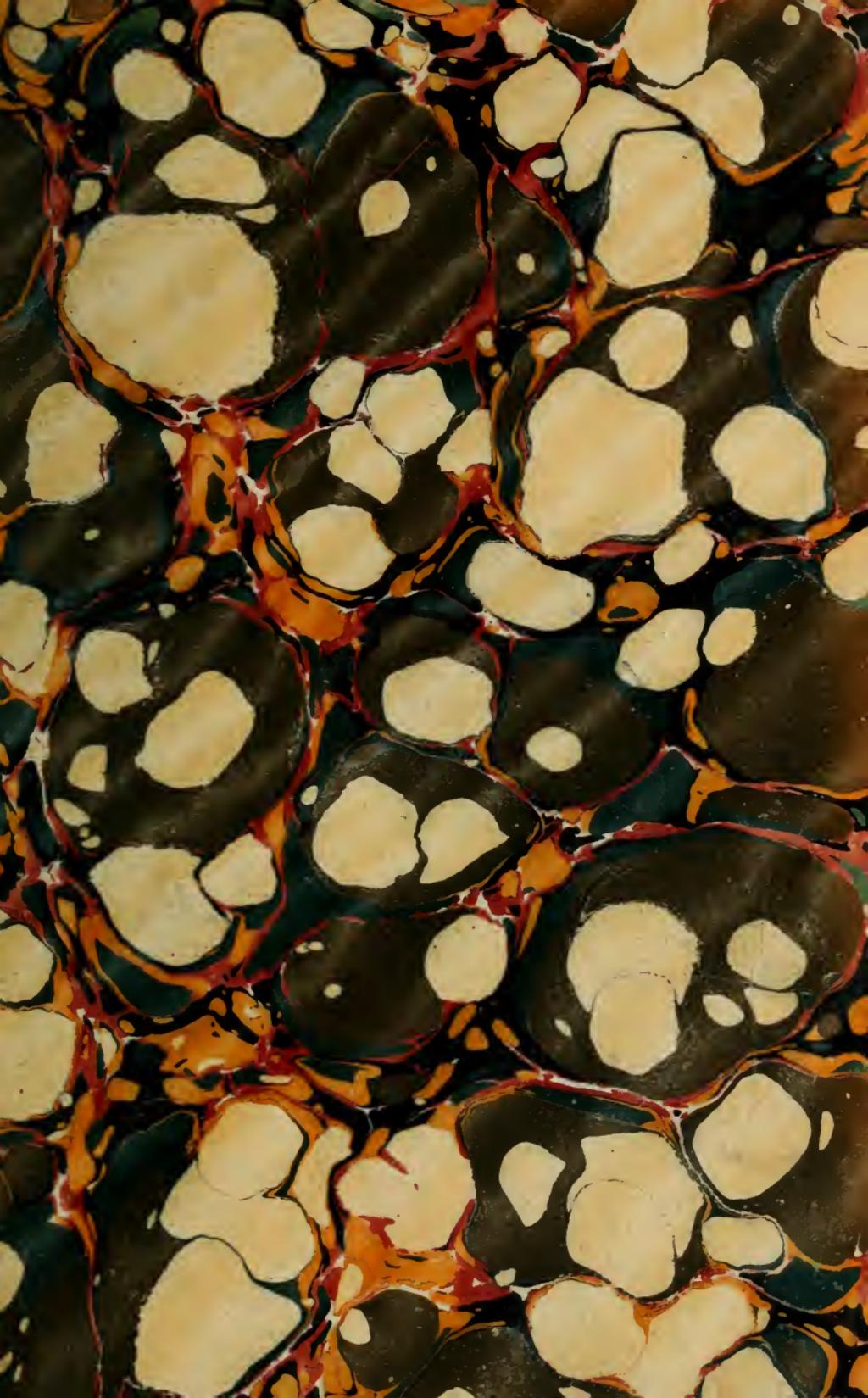
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MISREPRESENTATION

OR

SCENES IN REAL LIFE.

ONE OF A SERIES OF TALES ON THE PASSIONS.

— A l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
Di soave licor gli orli del vaso,
Succhi amari ingannato intanto ei lieve,
E da l'inganno suo, vita riceve.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MISREPRESENTATION;

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CHAPTER I.

MARY was not the only person who regretted Cecil Moubray's absence; Lady Emily, long accustomed to her society, felt the want of some one to whom she could safely confide her hopes for Anna, or fears of Eleanor; but it was to Sir Thomas Warham that her departure caused the greatest vexation. He had, it is true, heard her intention of going to Eldersleigh spoken of; but never had it occurred to him that she projected residing there altogether, or that a young woman of her age could prefer the solitude of a

country life to the gay fascinations of a spring in town ; and it was not until Lady Emily placed in his hands a small packet Cecil had left for him, that he could bring himself to believe she was really gone. “ Poor girl,” he said, at length, after reading her note, while something like a tear glistened in his mild grey eye ; “ poor Cecil ; from my heart I pity you ; you deserve a better fate.”

“ Dear me,” said Louisa, “ what can there be to pity about Miss Moubray ? Her own mistress ; a large fortune, which she may spend as she likes ; able to marry any man she chooses ; I must confess, that so far from pitying, I feel inclined to envy her ; at least, I know no one whose situation appears to me half so desirable.”

“ That’s not very complimentary to Lawson, Louisa. But, in the name of wonder, what induced Cecil to take herself off in this sudden manner ?”

“ There was nothing sudden,” replied Lady Emily : “ she has been talking about it for the

last three months ; and with regard to her motives, although I can't deny I was exceedingly sorry to part with her, still it seemed so natural that she should like to live at her own place, that I never thought of asking much about it."

" Cecil considers it the duty of a landowner to reside upon the property," observed Anna.

" That's all very true," replied the Baronet ; " it is the duty of landowners to live among their tenantry ; but it is no person's duty to run into danger ; and I very much fear Cecil will find she carried her idea of what is right quite too far, when she suffered it to lead her to bury herself alive in such a place as that."

" Cecil knew Eldersleigh was very much out of repair ; but when I asked whether it would not be better that Horace should give directions to have it put in order, she said no, for she thought it would be an amusement to furnish and improve it," said Lady Emily.

" It is not so much of Eldersleigh itself that I am speaking," replied Sir Thomas, " but of

the neighbourhood, and of the rascals who inhabit it. I met the other day, at dinner, the son of an old college friend of mine, who has been holding a living for a relation not far from Eldersleigh ; and from all he says of the people about there, I don't think I would trust a cat amongst them. Poachers, smugglers, wreckers, and desperate characters of all descriptions ; a set of villains, who live by plunder, and would think nothing of cutting your throat, or blowing your brains out."

" My dear Sir Thomas," cried Lady Emily, " what a dreadful picture ! Then Cecil may be murdered, or the house robbed, or some of the wretches will run away with her, as they do in Ireland, you know. St. Maur, is Sir Thomas's account correct ?"

" I trust not, Emily ; some of the people around may, perhaps, prove wild and turbulent characters, as is often the case by the sea-side ; but I think the statement must be exaggerated, at least I have heard nothing to warrant its ac-

curacy ; and I have been at Eldersleigh more than once."

" Perhaps not," replied Sir Thomas. " Of course, the rascals would keep quiet enough while you were there ; but it does not therefore follow that the account is incorrect. On the contrary, as Mr. Symonds appears a staid, sensible man, and has resided within ten miles of Eldersleigh for upwards of two years, I see no reason for doubting his accuracy ; and, although I don't imagine the mischief will go the length you anticipate, Lady Emily, Cecil may be greatly terrified ; for surely, to a young woman of her age, such a home must be highly inexpedient. It is impossible she can cope with characters of this description ; her life will be made miserable by worry and anxiety ; and ten to one, if, in a fit of perplexity, she does not throw herself away on some undeserving fellow or another. Some women marry for establishment ; others for protection."

" As for that," said Lady Emily, " Cecil is

engaged to Mr. Wickham. Still I am excessively concerned she should have gone to such a place; and I really think, Horace, I had better write and ask her to come and stay with us until her marriage takes place. It would be better in every respect, you know; she can choose her wedding clothes, and order the carriages and furniture, so much more easily in town."

"Certainly, Emily," replied Lord St. Maur, "by all means ask Miss Moubrey to return, if you think there is any probability of her accepting your invitation."

Lady Emily saw, by her brother's manner, that the idea was not agreeable to him, and forebore to press the subject.

"Indeed, mamma," said Louisa, "I believe you would find your kindness quite thrown away. Miss Moubrey considers herself infinitely too good to associate with such unrighteous persons as we are."

"Oh, Louisa!" interposed Anna. (But Louisa took no notice of the interrup-

tion.) “ She has, I assure you, adopted all sorts of strange notions ; and I fully expect we shall soon hear that she has been taken up for preaching in the open air.”

“ Preaching in the open air, my dear Louisa ? ” said Lady Emily ; “ I never heard of such a thing in my life ; I’m sure Cecil is too sensible a girl to make herself so ridiculous.”

“ She may not, perhaps, go quite so far ; but, Anna, you can’t deny that she entertains very extraordinary opinions ; you cannot, surely, have forgotten how oddly she talked about that ball at Selwood ; and one day, when I chanced to ask if she had replaced her ornaments ? — (you know, they were given up at her uncle’s death,) she replied, with the utmost gravity, that she considered her money to have been given her for other purposes ; just as if a young woman of her fortune were not entitled to jewels ; or, as if we were not at liberty to do what we like with our own.”

“ You are right, Louisa ; it is a singular circumstance that a girl of Miss Moubray’s age

prefers devoting her wealth to purposes of benevolence, rather than squandering it upon useless baubles," replied Lord St. Maur, gravely.

Louisa shrugged her shoulders: and Lady Emily, turning to Anna, remarked, " It was strange they had not yet heard from Cecil."

" Why, mamma," replied Anna, " Cecil said she would delay writing until she could tell us something about the people and neighbourhood. She said she thought it was absurd, in these days, when travelling is so safe, to write to people just to tell them what there is, in fact, little doubt about."

" But why," again asked Sir Thomas, " did she go at all?"

" I believe Anna has explained Miss Moubrey's motives," said Lord St. Maur. " I must, however, acknowledge, that, when first I was made aware of her purpose, I was as much surprised as you are now."

" It should have been prevented," urged Sir Thomas.

" You forget that Miss Moubrey is of age,

and entirely mistress of her own actions. I have no longer the slightest control over her."

"Besides," added Louisa, "Miss Moubray is too high-spirited to be controlled by anybody; especially when she is, as she thinks, acting on conscientious principles. Your good people are the most obstinate race in the world."

"Not *controlled*, perhaps," replied Sir Thomas, "but she might have been *influenced*; persuasion would do anything with her. I never met with a more affectionate disposition, or one it was more easy to lead."

"Yes," replied St. Maur, mournfully; "whom Cecil loved, she would have listened to."

During the remainder of that day, and the three following, Lord St. Maur was far from being an agreeable companion; as though endued with perpetual motion, he never ceased opening and shutting the doors, throwing up and down the windows, stirring the fires, walking

backwards and forwards ; doing, in fact, every-
thing which irritable gentlemen do when they
are out of temper. He was, to say the truth,
in a most uncomfortable state of perplexity ; for,
while his proud spirit writhed under the morti-
fying reflection that Cecil had taken this strange
step principally to avoid him, he could not
conceal from himself, that he ought to have laid
before her the possible consequences of her
precipitation. He now bitterly lamented that
he had suffered the disappointed lover, rather
than the watchful guardian, to prevail ; and
although still highly incensed against her, he
most sincerely wished he had, at least, *endea-
voured* to detain her. The effort might have
been fruitless ; he felt convinced it would ; but
then, at any rate, he would have been spared all
self-reproach ; the responsibility could no longer
have attached to him. Do we ever suffer angry
feelings to prevail, without afterwards regretting
our intemperance ?

But although Lord St. Maur saw the mischief, he knew not in what manner it might be averted. He felt that he ought to act, and saw not how. Were he to go down to Eldersleigh, what would be his reception ? And after her having so decidedly withdrawn herself from his protection, it appeared ridiculous to imagine she would again become an inmate of his house, or even listen to advice from him ; more particularly, if there were truth in Lady Emily's suggestion respecting Mr. Wickham. On the fourth morning came letters, which *quieted* the Earl, and pacified Sir Thomas ; for Cecil wrote in excellent spirits, and gave a lively account of her dilapidated residence : she had been most kindly welcomed to her native county ; had already seen several of her relatives and connexions, and was going to spend a few days at Ashford. Mr. Wickham's name did not occur in her letter, an omission which Sir Thomas considered as a good omen. “ Perhaps, (he thought) Lady Emily was right, after all ; and though, if she married

him, it could not be called a great match ; as marriages go, it might be a happy one.” Mary’s letter gave unqualified delight ; it was shewn to every member of the drawing-room, then to the ladies’ maids, and would doubtless have travelled further, had it not suddenly disappeared in a very unaccountable manner.

CHAPTER II.

THAT letter, however, gave but a poor index to Miss Moubray's state of spirits. The day after her arrival she held long conversations with Dr. Styleigh, and her steward ; and, strange to say, the result was satisfactory both to the clergyman and the man of business ; for the interest excited by the Doctor's account of the destitution of the peasantry, and her eager readiness to minister to their necessities, promised well for his increased importance, as the probable channel through which her benevolence would flow ; while the cheerfulness with which she engaged to enlarge the church, so as to accommodate a

larger number of the lower orders, induced the reverend gentleman to believe she would lend an equally favourable ear to certain improvements he meditated at the rectory ; and he even carried his golden visions so far as to contemplate the possibility of an addition to his annual stipend. Smithson, on his part, took leave of his young mistress, fully assured she was as ignorant of business as the babe unborn, and that a man who wished to act unhandsomely might find some very pretty pickings on her estate. He was not reckoned a dishonest man, that steward, nevertheless, the rents were worse paid that year than they had ever been before ; and a speculation requiring ready money, in which Mr. Smithson was largely concerned, became eminently successful.

That he should have formed this opinion of Cecil's abilities was not at all singular, since, in addition to her ignorance of the comparative value of lands, nature and expense of repairs, improvements, &c., in turning over the leaves

of a blotting book that lay on the library table, she observed her name written more than once ; and henceforth her mind became far more deeply engaged in speculating why, in order to try his pen, Lord St. Maur should have preferred that particular combination of letters than in listening to Smithson's prosy details.

Shortly after Dr. Styleigh's departure (for in the real course of events, he *succeeded* the steward), and while Cecil was still meditating on the melancholy description he had given of her tenantry, Mr. Wickham was announced. The conversation naturally turned to Miss Moubrey's last visiter, and the harrowing details which had formed the principal subject of their interview : it was hardly possible to avoid glancing at the rector, and Cecil was grieved to observe that, although Wickham spoke with infinite caution, his opinion of him was far from being favourable. The visit, which was merely one of inquiry, was speedily concluded ; and taking advantage of an April gleam of sunshine, she

sauntered out into the old-fashioned garden, which, planted towards the end of the seventeenth century, and almost entirely neglected during the last twenty years, presented a picture of bad taste and desolation, to which our heroine, accustomed to the tastefully-arranged and well-kept grounds of Selwood, was fully alive. How oppositely will a garden, seen at different periods, strike the thinking mind ! In order and in beauty, what scene more cheerful and enlivening ; for in its many-tinted flowers, and gay opening buds, it gives us, for the present, joy ; for the future, hope. But that same garden, in neglect and desolation, how sad and mournful ; it speaks but of the *past* ; those mutilated statues, those broken steps, those mouldering palisades—what are they, but memorials of the dead ?—tombstones, which need no epitaph ;—a silent message from the king of terrors, who, from the midst of what was once the haunt of health and cheerfulness, calls on us to remember, that we, like all around, are hastening

to decay. We look upon the few remaining shrubs, and think of those who planted, loved, and tended them. We pace the moss-grown walks, and memory is busy with the many who have trod those paths before. Cecil thought of her parents, her early home, her childhood—that pleasant time, when to gather cowslips in the park had been considered rare felicity ; to feed the gold and silver fish, an equal joy. Then Mary came before her ; and as she wandered musingly along, how did she wish to feel her little cousin's hand fast locked in hers, or hear the echo of her clear, ringing laugh, breaking the silence of that solitary place. A shower of rain, however, drove her into the house, and her attention was speedily forced into other channels.

It is something to be the uncontrolled possessor of wealth and lands. There is that in hereditary birth which challenges respect. The charm of beauty few men disallow ; and talents ever carry with them weight and influence. In

Cecil Moubray, all these advantages were centred; and yet, I believe, there are not many who would envy the state of feeling in which, with Mrs. Wilson as a *vis-à-vis*, she took her seat, for the first time, at the head of her own table. A trifling jar had occurred between the ladies respecting the dinner hour. Cecil, in ordering that important repast, had forgotten to mention the precise time at which she wished it to be served; but the omission was speedily remedied by Mrs. Wilson's ordering it at five o'clock: accordingly, at half-past four, the dressing bell was rung, when Cecil, accustomed to a much later hour, fancied there had been some mistake, and ordered the dinner to be kept back for at least an hour and a half, — an exercise of authority whereby Mrs. Wilson was sadly discomposed; for she knew that a late dinner would materially interfere with her prospects of what she called a little rational society, but which, in reality, meant gossiping tea parties, with the Styleighs and some other neigh-

bours of the same description ; and although she could not absolutely oppose Miss Moubrey's wish, she submitted with a very ill grace, and made so indifferent a meal, and continued, during the whole evening, in such an uncomfortable state of mind, that Cecil, imagining an early dinner necessary, perhaps, on the score of health, conceded the point. Her motive was better than her policy ; for in thus yielding to Mrs. Wilson's ill temper, she had established a precedent, and precedents are serious things both in political and domestic economy.

Mrs. Wilson, who loved to rule, (where is the woman who does not?) felt she had gained a victory, and failed not to take advantage both of it and of the insight she had obtained into Miss Moubrey's character ; and so well did she manage, that, in the course of a few months, she was infinitely more mistress of the house than was the fair owner herself. Indeed, but for Mason, who loved not the superintendence of so active and experienced a person, and conse-

quently resisted her authority to the utmost, the good lady would have reigned omnipotently from the drawing-room to the servant's hall. As Cecil was perfectly ignorant of household duties, Mrs. Wilson's interference, excepting that her notions of economy were too rigid for such an establishment, would have been rather advantageous than otherwise, had she been content to limit her operations to Eldersleigh, and its immediate inmates. But she chose a far more extensive sphere of action, and dispensed her invitations to dine and drink tea with so much liberality and sang froid, that Cecil sometimes felt inclined to doubt whether the stout, bustling dame, who made herself so perfectly at home, could possibly be the same individual who had stood formerly in such awe of her uncle. But General Moubray and his niece were very different persons, and their influence on Mrs. Wilson as opposite; perhaps, too, she was not altogether so inobtrusive as in by-gone days: the anxiety manifested by General Mou-

bray to retain her services had led to a high estimate of her abilities, and given notions of self-importance which did not formerly exist; nor had the two years spent among her relatives in a small country town tended to lessen these notions; while the gossiping habits she had there contracted rendered her an exceedingly uncongenial companion for a person of Cecil's cultivated mind and refined habits.

In fact, to neither of the latter qualities had Mrs. Wilson much pretension; she was not one of those females who, reared in every comfort, perhaps elegance, are forced, by change of circumstances, to leave the home, of which they formed at once the ornament and charm, and with all a *lady's* feelings and a *lady's* habits, seek a painful maintenance by imparting to others the talents and accomplishments which, in happier days, had formed a parent's pride. Her father had been a brewer in a county town, and her husband an officer in the ma-

rines, who fell in battle, leaving his widow in such straitened circumstances as rendered some exertion for her future support imperative. She went forth, therefore, as governess to the Misses Dupton, daughters of a country squire. This engagement was just completed, when Mrs. Moubrey (having been sadly teased by two *accomplished* young ladies, one of whom professed to teach everything, and knew nothing, and the other eloped with the second son of an Irish nobleman,) made an application to a friend for a respectable, well-principled woman, neither young nor pretty enough to attract the notice of the gentlemen, nor with the pretensions of the first-mentioned lady; and as Mrs. Wilson appeared, in some respects, to answer the description, she was despatched, per coach and diligence, without delay, to join Mrs. Moubrey's family on the continent; and although Mrs. Moubrey would, undoubtedly, have preferred a little more refinement in her daughter's

instructress, still, as in the most essential points Mrs. Wilson was not deficient, she did not hesitate to place Cecil in her charge.

From all this it will be seen, that the lady of whom we are speaking was rather estimable than agreeable ; and as, in addition to her want of polish, her person was large, and her taste in dress far from good, it is hardly singular that the more aristocratic portion of the neighbourhood were not ambitious of the acquaintance,—while she, tenacious of her dignity, and considering herself, in right of her *husband*, as a lady, and consequently entitled to visit at any house that did not boast a coronet, was perpetually giving umbrage by intruding her society where it was unwelcome, and in return, taking offence at the coldness with which her overtures were met. Cecil, much vexed by these *tracasseries*, would gladly have led a life of perfect seclusion ; and thus have saved Mrs. Wilson the mortification of being slighted, and herself the pain of witnessing those slights. There was

not much merit in making this trifling sacrifice, for the families within visiting distance were of the most common place description ; she would have lost; therefore, nothing in withdrawing from their society ; but a quiet, monotonous existence did not suit Mrs. Wilson, and Miss Moubray speedily discovered she had exchanged one evil for another ; the Hartlands, Berkeleys, Middletons, were to be succeeded by the Styleighs, Roberts's, and Browns.

Then, as she was young, wealthy, and inexperienced, everybody chose to give advice ; and because she did not always follow the instructions she received, much animadversion was passed upon her. By Lady Ashford, who was an invalid, she was informed that Eldersleigh was fearfully unwholesome, and that nothing but Morrison could preserve her from the baneful effects of such an atmosphere. Lady Ashford, however, was really an amiable person, and, as she followed up her prescription by begging Cecil to be as much as possible at

Ashford, her admonitions were productive of no great harm : but it was very different with her pompous lord, who, after a wearisome political harangue, informed our heroine that one of the present county members was expected shortly to retire, when he meditated bringing forward his eldest son, and should, of course, reckon on her strenuous support. Now although Cecil leant to the opposite side, her political bias was not sufficiently strong to induce her actually to oppose her relative ; but she entertained the notion that landowners ought not to interfere with, or in any manner attempt to influence, their tenants' votes ; and she hinted this opinion to his lordship. But as, in addition to being deaf, the Peer never for a moment contemplated the possibility of his eloquence proving powerless, he took no notice of her reply ; and great was the indignation with which he subsequently learnt her resolution.

Lady Middleton, after hearing and faintly approving the plans she had formed for the

amelioration of her tenantry, suggested several of her own, which she, of course, thought infinitely better. And while Miss Moubrey was divided between the rival systems, in came Mr. Birch, the apothecary, a very active person, a political economist, and a sensible man, who assured her that, if she really had the welfare of the poor at heart, she would adopt neither ; for charity, unless most judiciously dispensed, by inducing improvident habits, actually creates distress instead of relieving it ; that giving a higher rate of wages than was customary injured the farmers, without bestowing benefit upon the labourers, who, with few exceptions, spent their increased gains at the alehouse ; and wound up all by cautioning her respecting the characters she was employing about her park and garden ; an admonition which was totally disregarded by our heroine, who could not believe it possible that those who had tasted so largely of her bounty could prove ungrateful. But the time was not far distant

when she was to learn the fallacy of such a notion.

General Moubray's ideas of managing an estate had been comprised under the two heads, of getting high rents and keeping up his parliamentary influence ; and provided he succeeded thus far, he considered the state of his preserves, or of his tenants' morals, as things of little moment. Nor was it matter of concern to him that the inhabitants of the little neighbouring fishing town were, like Mr. Poulett Thompson, strenuous advocates of the free trade system ; and seldom failed of carrying their measures, in spite of coast-guard, revenue-cutters, and occasionally, the assistance of the military ; for the nature of the shore offered every facility for landing and concealing their contraband cargoes ; and once within the woods of Eldersleigh, pursuit was unavailing. It was, indeed, whispered, that by the exertion of a due portion of vigilance on General Moubray's part, this nefarious traffic might have been put down ; but he was

far too wary to interfere, many of these worthies being, in fact, the respectable *freemen* of B—— ; who, in return for his forbearance, failed not to choose his nominee as their representative in parliament ; while the small farmers, petty shopkeepers, and publicans, who found it highly agreeable to drink cheap, unadulterated spirits, had, most of them, votes for the county, and were amongst his staunchest supporters. Beyond, therefore, public expressions of disapproval, and occasional threats, which it was well known would not be acted upon, General Moulbray testified no ill-will towards his disorderly neighbours, although many a deed of lawless outrage had been committed by them ; and on one black December night, it was even said the gloomy forest echoed to the cry of blood.

But that was many years ago ; the peace, and the improved regulations in our tariff, by rendering foreign commodities more easily procured without violation of the law, took away much of the temptation to contraband dealing, and the

illicit traffic had gradually declined ; but the evil habits and disorderly spirit it had engendered still remained, and proved a source of very great annoyance to the unprotected Cecil. There had been, as above stated, a sort of tacit agreement between these gentry and their patron, the nature of which was fully understood by both parties ; and as the General's constituents were not inclined to underrate the value of their services, they considered themselves, in return for the support they gave him, fully entitled to make whatever use they chose of his property ; and saw no dishonesty whatever in snaring his game, shooting his deer, or robbing his orchards ; nor did they, when it served their convenience, hesitate to cut across the woods, plantations, or even pleasure-grounds.

At first, when Miss Moubrey was met at every turn by sturdy-looking men, in blue trousers, and check shirts ; women, in faded red cloaks ; and little, dirty, barefooted urchins, she was rather surprised than terrified ; for, like

many other persons, who know nothing at all about the matter, she fancied that poverty and virtue were *almost* linked together. But when, on a longer acquaintance, she was made aware of the real character of the intruders, she became alarmed, and determining to put an end to the trespass, directed her steward to take the necessary measures.

The inhabitants of B—— viewed this infringement of what they considered their rights with such dissatisfaction, that Mr. Walter Moubray, their representative, trembled for his seat, and resolved to call on his young kinswoman, and open her eyes to the consequences of what she was doing. He put his purpose into execution, and during the visit, under an affected desire for her safety and comfort, displayed so much egotism, that Cecil felt glad that a marriage he had recently contracted with his housekeeper, must form a barrier to any great intimacy between them, and probably preserve her from many such inflictions in future. Thus, from an early

period of her residence at Eldersleigh, much uncomfortable feeling sprung up between her and her tenantry ; nor was she more fortunate in gaining Dr. Styleigh's good opinion ; who, as we have before disclosed to our readers, had formed certain pleasing and profitable speculations, which Miss Moubray failed to realize, and consequently greatly excited the reverend gentleman's indignation. She willingly undertook to erect a new gallery for the accommodation of the poorer portion of the congregation, but gave no encouragement whatever to the Doctor's hopes of an increased salary, or addition to the Rectory. Her charitable donations were liberal to an extreme, but she chose to be her own almoner : and although she subscribed handsomely to the National School, she stated her intention of founding at Eldersleigh one of Industry, on the same principle as that at Selwood.

It was true, she allowed the number of children benefited in such instances to be smaller

than in other schools; but Cecil thought, to educate *well* a few children, was preferable to bestowing on many the dubious advantage of head knowledge, without enforcing, at the same time, industrious and orderly habits, which the very numbers at a National School renders impossible. But the Doctor was of another opinion: he was one of those who worship the Establishment rather than its God; and, looking on National Schools as a means of increasing the members of the church of England, was disposed to cavil at any system, however rational or well planned, which could possibly be the cause of diverting money into another channel. But when he learnt that, in addition to this misdeemeanor, Cecil had subscribed to the school belonging to the dissenting chapel, had placed a sum of money in the hands of the minister for the use of the poor, and, worse than all, had actually augmented the salary of that minister, from eighty to one hundred pounds per annum, Dr. Styleigh's anger knew no bounds. In vain

did Francis Munday, his exemplary curate, timidly remind him that Williams, their dissenting brother, laboured in the same cause, served the same Lord, whom they professed to honour ; that his exertions were unceasing, and many of his congregation the most peaceable of the community ; that he had a wife and children to support out of his very slender income, and yet was ever ready to contribute his mite to the sacred call of benevolence and Christian love.

As futile were Mrs. Styleigh's endeavours to recal to her husband's memory the excellency of the brawn, of which he so highly approved, and for which they were indebted to Miss Moubray's liberality ; or that the young ladies praised her great good nature in lending books, music, or drawings. Nothing could pacify the irritated clergyman ; he believed dissent, schism, and rebellion, to be synonymous ; and, on the following sabbath, relieved his overflowing wrath by a fierce diatribe on the subject. Mrs. Wilson,

little dreaming the Doctor would have the audacity thus to attack her young charge, turned up the whites of her eyes, drew her gloves on and off as she sat listening to the invectives and denunciations which, like an angry torrent, burst from the infuriated preacher ; while Cecil, who could not mistake the object and cause of all this ire, felt thoroughly disheartened.

She hoped to have found in her father's successor an experienced counsellor and judicious friend ; but it was quite evident Dr. Styleigh would be neither one nor the other ; and so much did his intemperance distress her, and the contrariety of opinions expressed by all around perplex and bewilder her young mind, that, in a fit of despair, she might, perhaps, have given up all, but for the encouragement she received from Mr. Wickham, to whom her difficulties were frequently referred ; for as he was a man of much sense and judgment, she felt great confidence in his opinion, a confidence which,

possibly, was not lessened by the circumstance that, on all essential points, his views agreed with hers.

Time was when Cecil wished Mr. Wickham had been her guardian instead of Lord St. Maur; and in some respects he might have been better fitted for the charge than that impetuous nobleman; there would, at any rate, have been no quarrels between him and his fractious ward, and she might have been happier. Whether her disposition would have equally improved, is another question—most likely not. We seldom see much deep feeling, or strength of character, in persons whose current of life flows easily; for although the rivulet may *smooth*, it will not *polish* the precious pebble it ripples over; to shew forth all the beauty of the gem, to make its value fully known, the lapidary must employ his skill.

There was, however, one of Miss Moubrey's employments in which Mr. Wickham took no

share; in the love of flowers he did not sympathize; for he thought more of the useful than the ornamental, and looked upon a flower-garden rather as a sort of appendage custom had rendered necessary to a country house than a source of amusement. Cecil remarked and regretted this want of taste; and from that time her interest in her garden slackened. We of this mortal life are such essentially dependent beings, that without an approving eye, or an encouraging voice, even our enjoyments lose half their relish. She felt the want of friendly approbation and advice also with regard to the alterations and improvements she attempted in the house itself. There are few persons totally insensible to the pleasure of embellishing a park, or furnishing a residence; and although her plans in this respect had been of the most moderate description, Miss Moubrey had certainly looked forward to the improvement of her new house, as one of the means by which

she hoped to occupy her time and thoughts, and drive from her remembrance all she had left behind.

But she was disappointed ; in fact, Eldersleigh, both from its nature and locality, was incapable of receiving any material change. Nothing could exceed the romantic beauty of the site, where, in the olden time, the proud baronial castle, the early residence of her ancestors, reared its majestic front, and while the massive thickness of the yet remaining walls shewed it had been a place of exceeding strength, there were not wanting tokens of the grace and elegance lavished upon it by the sculptor's care. But with the hall it was far otherwise : commenced towards the close of the fourteenth century, and enlarged at many different periods, and in accordance with as many different tastes, the building looked precisely as though a certain number of pointed roofs, gable ends, stacks of chimneys, doors, and windows, had been dropped

by accident, and suffered to accommodate themselves as they best could.

Still, as viewed from the front, flanked on one side by the little church, on the opposite by a belt of thick plantation, while the ground, still richly wooded, rose precipitately in the rear, it was far from being an unpicturesque object ; but the beauty was all external ; the interior of the house was gloomy and inconvenient to the last degree ; and, unhappily, the manner of its arrangement rendered any idea of improvement, short of entire rebuilding, perfectly hopeless. There were narrow, wide, steep, and winding staircases. Passages of all descriptions—short passages, long ones, crooked passages and straight. Dark passages leading to the best rooms, and light ones, which sometimes seemed to lead to nothing at all. An equal variety of rooms—large, small, and moderate ; but all full of doors, low, dark, and cheerless. It was impossible to impart an appearance of *elegance* to such an

abode; but comforts might be added, and this Cecil lost no time in doing; some of the least-appalling looking bed-rooms were modernised, while chairs that *could* be lifted, sofas, whose well-stuffed cushions gave the repose they promised, velvet pile carpets, damask curtains, whose ample folds really excluded drafts, tables, book-shelves, stools, ottomans, and all the *etceteras* indispensable to a modern ladies' sitting-room, replaced the scanty supply of furniture.

But the satisfaction with which she contemplated her new arrangements was speedily chilled by the faint praise, or well intended, but disheartening caution, or scarcely-concealed disapprobation, these alterations, trifling, or even necessary, called forth. Poor Mrs. Wilson, who lived in a sort of nervous fever lest Miss Moubray should exceed her income, kept up a running fire of admonitory charges, and welcomed each arrival of a chair or table with a groan. Lord Ashford, on the other hand, pronounced the additions to be mean and paltry, a

waste of money, too, for, as his lordship fully intended that Cecil should become his daughter-in-law, he looked forward to the entire refurnishing of the place on a more splendid scale.

Lady Middleton was offended that Cecil had preferred a London tradesman to the upholsterer she had recommended from the neighbouring town ; and Doctor Styleigh, while luxuriating in a most attractive *fauteuil*, delivered a lecture on the absurd fancies of fashionable people, their imaginary wants and selfish indulgences ; and then broke forth into an exhortation on the necessity of cultivating real religion, and in a loud, stentorian voice, reminded Cecil that these were perilous times, that the throne and altar were in danger, and *must* and *ought* to be supported, which, translated into plain English, meant, “ Why do you not increase my stipend and improve the rectory before you lay out so much money upon such gimcrack fooleries ? ” Even Mr. Wickham, although he admitted the necessity of the change, and admired the taste

Cecil had displayed in selecting her new furniture, felt something like regret for that she had ejected. “It was,” he said, “like parting with old friends;” and although he did not venture to call in question either the beauty or the merits of the present *meubles*, their predecessors he thought more in keeping with the general style of the mansion.

Miss Moubrey did not contradict this opinion; for she could not avoid remarking, that, amidst all the elegant litter wherewith she had clothed the rooms, nothing appeared so well in place as Mrs. Henrietta Beauclerc’s old china vases; and she almost looked upon it as an omen that the resolution she had made of always remaining single would not be interfered with—a token that their destinies would be alike. But the idea depressed her; there was something so very cheerless in the prospect.

CHAPTER III.

How merrily yon little vessel wends her way, breasting the sunny waves ! while from her prow the dashing spray falls in bright sparkling drops like diamond showers ; in truth, she is a gallant barque—Hope's very emblem—all life and buoyancy : yet sad her errand, for she speeds to distant climes in search of health, and sorrow and anxiety keep watch within her. Upon the deck, carefully shrouded from the noon-day sun, and propped by pillows, lies a pale, sickly girl ; and one bends over her, whose haggard glance and care-worn features shew that he plays

for his last stake of happiness, and knows the chances are against him. And he is noble, wealthy, great, that hopeless mourner; but what are these at such a time?—what glittering gold, or high descent, or fair renown, to him who sees his dearest treasure fast vanishing away? Oh! he would give them all—lands, wealth, and station—could he ensure his Mary's life.

But suffering times are often sin-remembering times; and as he looked in anguish on his drooping child, could he but think, with softened feelings, of her mother? Must he not regret the bitterness of spirit which even death had failed to quench? not call to mind his own short-comings, and forgive her faults? And when, in painful watchfulness, he paced the deck, in all the still solemnity of night, and fed his eyes on the bright firmament, or listened to the deep, deep roll of the restless waters, he felt how mean, how pitiful, a thing is man! how wonderful the Power which could create, uphold, direct, this mighty universe! And, humbled with a

sense of his insignificance, softened by his heavy trial, shaken in his estimate of happiness by seeing all he dearly prized now ready to escape his grasp, his haughty spirit bowed itself beneath the rod; and Lord St. Maur became an altered man.

Mary knew not her danger, and eagerly talked of the places they were to visit; Lisbon, Gibraltar, and above all, Naples, where Lady Newrystown had promised to be; and Cecil, too, —for the frank-hearted child was positive that, “when she heard how ill she was, Cecil would come and nurse her.” Lord St. Maur dared not contradict her, although he feared that long before the winter Mary herself would be beyond all human aid and kindness. He knew, also, that should her precious life be lengthened out, she would owe nothing to Miss Moubray’s care.

From the period of Cecil’s leaving Selwood Mary had drooped; but little notice was taken of her illness; in fact, excepting by her faithful Reynolds, it had not even been remarked; and she,

well aware how much her little charge had suffered from her cousin's departure, attributed the change in Mary's health simply to grief, hoped the impression would wear off, and forebore to mention what she thought too lightly of. Lady Emily was entirely engrossed in the amusements and petty anxieties of a London season ; while Lord St. Maur's character seemed to have undergone an entire metamorphosis. He, once so domestic, was now seldom to be found at home ; his former occupations and tastes were relinquished for others of a more exciting, but less innocent, description ; the temper, naturally quick and easily roused, yet as easily appeased, became habitually morose ; even the devoted love he had borne his child was little more than cold indifference. Mary's illness, therefore, was wholly unsuspected, until a sudden change in the features of the disorder betrayed its fatal tendency. But the Earl's apprehensions, once raised, he became almost frantic ; and, in accordance with the advice of the numerous physicians

he consulted, resolved to try the effect of an entire change of scene and climate without loss of time. A yacht was purchased, a talented young physician engaged, and they sailed on their mournful pilgrimage. On first becoming aware, however, of Mary's danger, he had written to tell Cecil of the blow that threatened him, and receiving no answer to his letter, left England, marvelling that he ever should have loved a being so utterly devoid of feeling.

But that letter never reached Miss Moubrey; she was again staying with Lady Ashford when it arrived, and on returning home, among the many packets she found upon her writing-table, there was none from Lord St. Maur. From the public prints Cecil first learnt that he had left England, and the object of his journey; and, full of terror and anxiety, wrote to Lady Emily, who, in the course of the following week, contrived to despatch (not without some effort, for she hated letter writing) the following reply:—

Grosvenor Square, June 24.

“ I AM quite vexed, my dear Cecil, to observe, from the date of your letter, that I have been more than a week in answering it; but I am sure you will excuse me when you hear how much I have had to think of lately, particularly as you know I make a rule of answering letters, if possible, by the following post. But we have been shockingly frightened by Louisa’s having been upset, (Lawson, who is the worst whip in the world, was driving,) but fortunately, excepting being terrified to death, no mischief was done, and she is now quite as well as before the accident; but, of course, we were all horribly anxious, and poor Anna lost several very pleasant parties. It really is a very sad thing that Robert should be so fond of money, for if he had chosen to allow Louisa a proper equipage instead of that nasty one-horse phaeton, all this would not have happened. I have spoken seriously to him on the subject, but, I fear, with very little effect; he is evidently far from liberal, and I am almost

tempted to regret my daughter ever married him; I dare say, if she had waited a little longer, Mr. Coxe Fellowes would have offered, but it's too late now to think about that; one thing, however, is certain, he still admires Louisa very much indeed. It grieves me, dearest Cecil, that I cannot contradict the report to which you allude. Horace has, indeed, left England, and Mary is with him; but although no one can deny she is a good deal out of health, in my opinion *that* is not the only cause for his going abroad. He has, I am sorry to say, been playing high—has lost considerable sums—and wishes to retrench, so at least I am informed by William Beauclerc, who is, you know, quite in my brother's confidence. Notwithstanding my dislike to the continent, I should have been glad to have accompanied St. Maur, but it was quite impossible, on account of my daughters, particularly Anna, as Mr. Thornborough has not yet declared himself, although there is no doubt he will propose; so to take her away just now would, in all probability,

put an end to everything, and I did not like to leave her with Louisa, for though she would, I am sure, have done all in her power to promote her sister's happiness, she has not had experience enough to be trusted with the management of so delicate an affair ; I therefore told St. Maur that I could not, consistently with my duty to my children, leave England just at present, and I am happy to say he agreed with me, which was most fortunate, for I assure you, my dear Cecil, his temper has been very unpleasant lately, and I offended him dreadfully one day by something I happened to say about Eleanor. I wish, now, I had followed your advice not to speak to him on the subject. I forgot to mention that the moment Lady Newrystown heard of the journey she determined on going to Italy with her youngest boy, and she will spend the winter wherever St. Maur settles, I believe, at Naples. *Entre nous*, I am very much inclined to think the whole was a preconcerted plan between her and my poor deluded brother.

“ June 27th.

“ IT is impossible to express the pleasure with which I inform you Mr. Thornborough has at length proposed; the marriage is to take place as soon as possible, for, you know, delays are dangerous; men are so apt to change their minds, especially when girls have not much money. Sir John and Lady Thornborough are delighted with the connexion, and I am sure so am I. The young people will have about sixteen hundred a year, and Sir Thomas lends them Westfield for the first twelvemonth. The Thornborough estate is worth about five thousand a year, besides which there is money in the family, so that Anna has every chance of being perfectly happy. She desires her kind love, and hopes you will be one of her bridesmaids. We shall be obliged to ask one of the Miss Lawsons, which is really provoking, for they are shockingly vulgar, and the second has just engaged herself to the son of a retired manufacturer, very rich, I believe, but low, of course. However, Louisa keeps up her

own consequence, and avoids anything like intimacy. And now, my dear Cecil, farewell.

“ Yours affectionately,

“ EMILY WARHAM.

“ If you cannot come to the wedding, Sir Thomas talks of paying you a visit; I am afraid I shall hardly be able to make out mine this year. I am sorry I have not got a frank; I miss St. Maur dreadfully in this respect.”

It is impossible to say whether, on reading this epistle, disgust at the unfeeling selfishness of the writer, horror that the honourable, high-minded St. Maur should become a gambler, or grief for her beloved Mary, prevailed in Cecil’s mind. But soon anxiety swallowed up all other feelings, and it was with fretful impatience she looked forward to the Baronet’s arrival; she hoped from him to hear the truth at least. But his report of Mary only confirmed her fears. Far from holding Lady Emily’s opinion respecting the nature of the illness, he believed the case hopeless, so much

so, indeed, that the taking her abroad was, he said, “an absurdity; her life might be perhaps prolonged for a few weeks, but a recovery was out of the question.”

“I wish much to write to my poor Mary,” said Cecil; “I suppose there would be no difficulty in obtaining Lord St. Maur’s address?”

“Write to Mary?” he replied, querulously; “hem, don’t know what to say about that. Better leave it alone, perhaps; ten to one if she lives to get your letter, poor child; and even if she did it might only unsettle her mind, and do mischief. She fretted sadly after you.”

“Save me from my friends,” is an often quoted aphorism, but surely no person had ever greater cause to feel its justice than Cecil Moubray. Sir Thomas spoke without consideration, and Cecil, unfortunately, followed his advice; for it occurred to her that possibly Lord St. Maur did not wish for any further intercourse between her and his daughter, and this was perhaps the reason she had been kept in ignorance of Mary’s

illness. Yet, painful as was, undoubtedly, this reflection, no feelings of resentment towards him mingled with her grief; but in the rapid tears which coursed each other down Miss Moubrey's cheeks as she mourned Mary's early doom, many there were for the afflicted father, now so soon to lose this precious object of his fond affection, his more than woman's love.

Sir Thomas remained but a few days; and gratified as Cecil had felt herself at receiving this visit from her kind old friend, she was not, it must be confessed, altogether sorry when he had bidden farewell to Eldersleigh; for she found it rather difficult to amuse and interest him. In fact, the Baronet was not himself. Many circumstances had occurred latterly which tended to discompose his usual evenness of temper. The law suit had certainly terminated in his favour; but it was exceedingly questionable whether the value of his new property would counterbalance the enormous expense its acquisition had entailed; and as he had been in the habit of spending at

least two-thirds of his time at Selwood, the breaking up of that establishment was a serious evil to him. His future plans, too, were quite unsettled. To save the necessity of a more costly contribution he had made over Westfield to the newly-married couple for the next twelvemonth; and in the meantime was at a loss how to dispose of himself. He thought of running over to France for six weeks, and afterwards of taking a look at his Kilkenny property; but neither of these schemes promised much amusement; for Sir Thomas had come to that time of life when any interruption to the settled habits or usual routine is vexatious, and when, like unhinged gates or doors that require oil, we move neither easily nor harmoniously.

Towards the beginning of August, Cecil had the great pleasure of welcoming Caroline. The Hartfields were in England for a few weeks, and whilst he enacted the dutiful towards his family, and the agreeable towards the Right Honourable friend from whose influence he hoped to gain

a better appointment, his lady, with her two children, repaired to Eldersleigh. We do not often meet with persons whose position in life presents a greater contrast than our heroine and her friend ; Caroline, happy in all the kindred ties, and possessing but a bare maintenance ; Cecil, the uncontrolled mistress of a large fortune, and without one single near relation. Neither were their dispositions more alike. They were, however, warmly attached, and met with sincere delight, although the two years and a half that had elapsed since they were last together had wrought no little change in both. Miss Moubrey's disposition was, it is true, much softened by her trials, but it was also saddened ; the almost aerial slightness of her figure, and her extreme delicacy of appearance, sufficiently proclaimed how hard had been the struggle, how severe the blow ; while care-worn wrinkles might be traced on Carry's once smooth forehead ; for, though a happy wife and mother, her married life was not without a cloud.

The Hartfields, as our readers are aware, were much restricted in their means. Like almost all poor people, they had the prospect of a numerous family, and however riches in themselves may fail of bestowing happiness, “a narrow income (as an old lady once somewhat quaintly observed) “is just as great an enemy to ease as a tight shoe.” Each lamented the alteration she perceived in her companion; Carry feared that Cecil was not sufficiently alive to all the blessings of her lot; and that by indulging in a state of morbid sensibility she would fritter away her capability of enjoyment, and eventually undermine her health; while she, in her turn, regretted that Carry’s affection for her husband and children should lead her so entirely to neglect the talents and accomplishments for which she had formerly been conspicuous. Our heroine little guessed how all-absorbing are the household duties when an inadequate income renders the most trifling expenditure a matter of consideration; and Mrs. Hartfield had not the slightest

suspicion of the nature of that grief which cankered Cecil's peace, and cast a baneful shadow over her existence.

I am by no means one of those who think, with Madame de Stael, that love, merely an episode in man's existence, forms the whole story of a woman's life; neither do I believe that women break their hearts or die for love. I am aware that once a poor *Provençale* (I believe she was from Provence) did most unadvisedly fix her affections on a marble statue, and *look* herself to death. But I have also heard that more than one gentleman has fancied himself a tea-pot; we must not therefore imagine that every girl who happens to love unhappily will fall a victim to her attachment, any more than that all fanciful invalids enact the tea-pot or the sitting hen. I must confess that I, at any rate, am willing to give full credit to Mr. Abernethy's assertion, that the only *really* broken heart he had ever known was that of a poor coal-heaver.

But there were peculiarities in Cecil Moubray's case. Mrs. Moubray, unlike the generality of mothers, had no ambition to get rid of her daughter ; on the contrary, aware of General Moubray's anxiety for a splendid alliance, and wishing, if possible, to preserve her child from the fate which so often awaits the heiress, she had been strenuous in impressing on her mind the probable danger to which she was exposed. Thus tutored, Cecil found nothing to gratify her vanity, or call forth her gratitude, in attentions which, she believed, were owing to her future wealth alone ; and, although inundated with proposals, and perpetually surrounded by professed admirers, never for a single instant had her feelings been interested until the time when, mistaking *love* for *gratitude*, her warm young heart attached itself to Lord St. Maur ; for he had soothed her in adversity : others had sought her in the hours of joy ; but *he*, in the deep gloom of poverty and grief. And while

his noble-minded conduct acquired increased lustre by the contrast, her newly-awakened feelings were, perhaps, of a more intense nature, from the painful circumstances under which they had first been called into being : for those are often the most deeply-rooted attachments that date from a period of suffering, just as the richest odours are exhaled by those flowers which yield their fragrance to the night air only.

The loneliness of her position, also, destitute as she was of relatives, almost of friends, gave additional strength to her ill-fated love : there were no counteracting affections. But even independent of the interest Lord St. Maur had inspired, Cecil would hardly have been happy, since, in her lot, the very essentials of woman's happiness (earthly, at least) were wanting. *Man* may find enjoyment in the active scenes of life, because his duties often lead him there; but *woman's* duties take a narrower sphere, and her pleasures principally spring from the dear social ties. Woman, to be happy, must be either

daughter, sister, wife, or mother; but Cecil Moubray was none of these;—she was an isolated being, treading alone the dreary path of life, without one friendly arm to stay—one friendly voice to cheer or guide her.

SCENES IN REAL LIFE.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. HARTFIELD's application prospered. Early in September he joined his family, and in the following week arrived an official despatch, announcing the successful termination of his suit.

“ Congratulate me, dearest Cecil,” said Mrs. Hartfield. “ Hartfield has gained a step, and we are transferred to Naples.”

“ Naples!” exclaimed Miss Moubray, starting.

“ Yes, we are going to Naples ; and much do I wish you would look favourably on a little plan of mine, and spend the next few months with us there. I understand Naples is expected to be

full of English next winter. Will you make one amongst us? Pray do; you know not how much pleasure your presence would confer."

The first expression of Miss Moubrey's speaking eyes, on hearing this proposal, was one of gladness; the next was dark and sad. The idea of exchanging her gloomy residence and solitary life for Naples and Caroline Hartfield's society, was at first very attractive; but a moment's consideration reminded her, that, having taken on herself the duties of a resident landowner, she ought not lightly to abandon them; besides, as it was possible Lord St. Maur might settle at Naples for the winter, there would be, at any rate, imprudence in her accompanying her friends. She therefore thanked Caroline for her kindness; at the same time, firmly, but affectionately, declaring her inability of profiting by it.

"But your reason, Cecil? You have not told me why you will not come."

"One very cogent reason is, that as Eldersleigh is my appointed home, I do not think I

should be justified in leaving it, while there is yet so much remaining to be done. Now do not urge me, Carry ; it is not, be sure, from want of inclination that I stay behind ; but, indeed, I think it would be wrong to leave this place just now. Then say nothing ; for you know that when our duties and wishes are at variance, how very difficult it is to choose the right path ; therefore, if you try your powers of persuasion, as my inclinations will second you, I shall infallibly yield, and afterwards regret my weakness. So you must not, indeed, you must not, tempt me.”

“ But, my dear Cecil, I see no duty in the business.”

“ Should not landowners live upon their property ?”

“ Of course they should. But I am pleading only for a temporary absence ; you cannot surely think you are never to leave home ? Besides, you owe a duty to yourself as well as to your

tenantry; even on the score of health you will require change: and greatly as I have enjoyed the time I have been spending here, I cannot help fearing Eldersleigh will prove a very dismal residence in the dark winter months."

"Not very cheerful, certainly."

"Had you even a suitable companion, I should feel less at the prospect of leaving you behind; but really, poor dear Mrs. Wilson, though undoubtedly a very good creature, is not exactly the sort of person to give spirit to a long winter's evening."

"Do you forget that Elizabeth has kindly promised to spend some weeks with me?"

Caroline had not forgotten; but still anxious (if possible) to overcome Cecil's resolution, endeavoured to combat her objections, and finding her efforts unavailing, said at last, with some archness,—

"Well, Cecil, since you are so decided, I shall be a convert to Edward's opinion."

“ And what does Mr. Hartfield think ? ”

“ That Langton will not long remain without a mistress.”

“ Probably not,” replied Miss Moubrey.

“ Then I may wish you joy ; although I am half inclined to scold you for your want of confidence.”

“ I have shewn none here, Carry. Nor may you congratulate me, unless, indeed, you are satisfied that the future Mrs. Wickham will prove a most delightful neighbour ; and, to speak truth, I fear my selfishness will make me very fastidious on that subject ; for, since I have been here, I have found Mr. Wickham’s friendship and advice so (I may say) essential to my comfort, that I should not find it easy to look favourably on the person who would necessarily occupy his time and thoughts to my exclusion. I am aware all this is very wrong ; but really he has made himself so useful I hardly know how I shall bear his loss, even were it only for his good-nature in calling so frequently of an

evening, which, you know, saves me the ennui of amusing my poor old friend by playing piquet ; an act of friendliness which I value more, because, on principle, he objects to cards, and, excepting in this instance, which is one of pure kindness, never plays."

" And you, Cecil,—do you object to cards ? "

" I dislike them cordially, and gladly would be exempt from ever touching one. But poor Mrs. Wilson's sight is weak, and she fancies she cannot get through the evening without her " game," as she calls it, and I humour her ; but, in truth, it is a complete exercise of patience, from which I am most thankful to be relieved."

" How few young women of fortune are there who will thus sacrifice their inclinations to the amusement of an inferior," thought Caroline, looking fondly at Miss Moubrey.

" Cecil," she said, " when I have considered all your worldly advantages, and thought of the many snares with which your path was spread, do you know I have sometimes trembled for

you ; but I was mistaken ; you are not spoilt, my dearest friend ; you are as free from selfishness as ever."

" I have been in the furnace, Caroline ; and the same source from whence I drew comfort under trial, and strength in difficulty, taught me that I must not please myself."

" You think more seriously, then, than you did formerly ?"

" Not only more seriously, but, in some respects, differently."

" Were you to live your life over again, would you act otherwise than you have done ?"

" I will not venture to pronounce ; for we are all so weak and erring, that, placed in the same temptation, I might again give way ; but this I will say, that if I could retrace my steps, I would endeavour to curb this proud heart of mine, since, had I been more aware of the deformity of pride, and sought to overcome instead of cherishing that evil passion, I am confident many of my trials would have proved less

severe ; some, perhaps, I should have escaped altogether. But it is too late to speak of what might have been ; the past is beyond control, the present and the future ought to be our only care."

" And you really believe Mr. Wickham comes so frequently to play piquet with Mrs. Wilson purely from good-nature ?" inquired Caroline, after a brief silence.

" Indeed, Carry, I do. Mr. Wickham is one of those persons who take pleasure in obliging others ; you know not how useful I have found him. Indeed, I may say to you, that without his encouragement I hardly know how I should have borne up against Dr. Styleigh's overbearing dictation, and the almost impertinent interference of some other persons in this neighbourhood. So you must not tell me he is going to be married ; for this winter, at least, I cannot spare him."

" Nay, Cecil, as Mr. Wickham's marriage entirely depends on you——"

“ Surely,” interrupted Miss Moubrey, “ *you* do not believe that foolish gossip ?”

“ Come with us to Naples, and I will not believe, or even wish it to be true, although I think, in many respects, you would secure your happiness in accepting him.”

“ I cannot, Caroline.”

“ To which of my propositions is that negative applied ?”

“ To both.”

“ Once more, again then, I must ask your reasons ? Now do not look so grave. As an old and much-attached friend, I surely have a claim upon your confidence. Then throw aside this reserve, so foreign, so very foreign, to your character.”

“ I have already mentioned my objections to leaving Eldersleigh. And with regard to your other plan, dear Caroline, it is easily disposed of. Mr. Wickham and I are friends ; *more* we shall never be, for the very best reason in the world, want of inclination. Mr. Wickham, believe me,

has no wish to marry me; and were it otherwise, it would indeed be subject of regret to me.'

"O, Cecil, that is mock modesty; Mr. Wickham has long admired and loved you."

"Why, then, has he never told me of his admiration?"

"Because he is well aware that the advantages of the marriage are on your side; and he is so diffident, that, although sincerely attached, he will, I am confident, not be able to muster courage to declare himself without very considerable encouragement."

"Then silence will ever seal his lips; for I esteem him so much, I would not lose his friendship, or wound his feelings, for the world. And I *could* not be his."

"Because——?"

"I do not love him; and you know my resolution of old, Carry."

"I have not forgotten it; but I question your wisdom in still adhering to it."

"And yet I cannot do otherwise."

“ But, dearest Cecil, what is usually called love, is not, believe me, essential to married happiness. Esteem, regard, a feeling of dependence, are all that is necessary,—on the *woman's* part, at least.”

“ *You* did not think so, Carry.”

“ I cannot deny ours *was* a marriage of affection ; but, you know, we are not altogether without drawbacks. In fact, there is no perfect happiness in this life ; therefore, dearest Cecil, look not for it. Pray do not suffer a romantic notion of visionary bliss to make you throw away a real, substantial good.”

“ I entertain no such visions : I anticipate no future that my present life does not shadow forth ; such as I am, I mean to live and die.”

“ Oh, that is worse, a thousand times worse ; I shall suffer you to entertain no such *foolish*—(forgive the word) such foolish opinions. You are the last person in the world to think of leading a single life.”

“ Why so, Carry ?”

“ From the want of natural relations. Believe me, Cecil, that however opinions may differ as to the respective chances of happiness between the wife and single woman, *you* must not take your stand among the sisterhood.”

“ And yet, dear Carry, there shall I be found at last.”

“ You are not, surely, serious ? ”

“ I am, indeed. What should I gain by marrying ? Rank I do not covet ; of wealth I have more than I require. What, then, should I gain ? Nothing ! And I might lose much.”

“ You would increase your influence, at any rate, dear Cecil ; and by influence, when duly exercised, we greatly augment our sphere of usefulness.”

“ True ; a married woman has more extensive opportunities than an unmarried one. But does she make full use of all this power ? I fear, but seldom ; at least, I believe that by far the greatest proportion of active and self-denying benevolence must be traced to the despised

old maid; and as I am not better than my neighbours, I question whether I should even gain in that respect."

" But remember, Cecil, that if the wife is less obviously engaged in active usefulness, it is because she is engrossed in other duties. The care and education of her children draw largely on her time and thoughts, affording an occupation which, from its importance, takes precedence of all others. Indeed, were it on no other account, I should adjudge the palm of merit to the devoted mother."

At this moment, a cow, which had lately lost her calf, roared in the distance so opportunely, that Cecil could not forbear smiling, as she asked—

" How much merit do you adjudge to that afflicted mother, Carry?"

" I can sympathize with her; although, from the manner in which you ask the question, it would seem as if you placed all parental affection on the same basis. Now, I really do think

that a Christian mother is something better than a cow or barn-door hen."

" And I agree with you ; for as we rise in the scale of creation, our duties and our pleasures are, and must be, of a higher order. Still I can hardly allow merit for their performance, although, undoubtedly, the omission would be sinful ; any more than I should consider the preservation of life a subject of praise, though its destruction would be a crime. I will even go further, and say, that I believe parents often make their duty to their children a cloak for their own self-indulgence—a snare into which the single woman is less liable to fall, for her temptations are not so great, nor is there the same ground for self-deception. If *she* shrinks from an unpleasant duty, she must stand prepared to be considered selfish."

Cecil spoke with some warmth, for she thought of Lady Emily.

" And do you really think single women more estimable than married ones ? "

“ Not that they *are*; but that they *might* be.”

“ Pray, Miss Moubrey,” said Mr. Hartfield, who had entered the room about ten minutes previously, but had hitherto remained silent, “ since you have so unceremoniously demolished this graceful fabric, on which I have no doubt my good little wife has for some time been fixing her regards; what will you say to the woman who devotes herself to her husband, and seeks his happiness above her own? Is *she* selfish too?”

“ Unquestionably.”

“ You will hardly prove that, I think; at least, it is a subject upon which I should not be easily persuaded,” he replied, looking affectionately at Caroline.

“ It is, nevertheless, quite true. For when a woman loves, what greater pleasure has she than to please the object of her affection? In seeking, therefore, to fulfil his wishes, she does but gratify her own.”

“ On my word, Miss Moubrey, you seem so

thoroughly to understand the grounds and motives of a wife's dutiful behaviour, it is a thousand pities you do not do more than *speak* upon the subject."

" You forget I am enlisted on the other side."

" But you must desert, dear Cecil," said Carry.

" Desert! Fie, Carry, fie. When was a Moubray guilty of such weakness?"

" Her uncle was not particular in that respect," thought Mr. Hartfield; while Caroline rejoined, " But your happiness, Cecil, your own happiness requires it."

" Is it certain that by marrying I *should* increase my happiness?"

" I think so," replied Caroline; but at any rate your comfort would be secured. Woman needs protection."

" Caroline is right," said Mr. Hartfield. " You want a stronger arm to keep these people under; it seems they hold the law of *Meum* and

Teum in little estimation in this part of the world."

"There are, I am afraid, some wild spirits in the neighbourhood," replied Miss Moubray.

"Wild, indeed, if they are like two men I met this morning in those woods of yours. I never saw more ill-looking ruffians in my life. Your gamekeeper tells me he expects rough work this winter; and I can well believe him. Depend upon it the scoundrels know all the advantage of having a woman to deal with, and will make the most of it."

"My dear Cecil, I can't bear to think of leaving you so unprotected in the midst of such creatures," said Mrs. Hartfield.

"Do our laws offer no defence? Will not justice punish the offender, and protect the helpless?"

"Law! justice!" said Hartfield; "oh, that will never do, my dear Miss Moubray; protect yourself by all means, if you can; but do not think of prosecuting; you had better lose every

pheasant, hare, or partridge, aye, let them even strip your poultry-yard or cabbage-garden, than attempt to stay the evil by a prosecution. You would only raise a hornet's nest about your ears, take my word for it. The rascals all hang together, and would resent, even revenge, the slightest injury to one of their gang. No, no, you must not prosecute. As I before observed, protect your property, but leave the law alone; believe me, it would be better for you, a young, single woman, to bear any degree of annoyance than run the risk of irritating such a set of savages. *Forbearance* should rank foremost among the list of an old maid's virtues."

"Cecil," cried Caroline, "you *must* come with us; this is, indeed, no place for you."

Cecil smiled mournfully. "Never fear, Caroline; I shall do very well. Mr. Hartfield wants to frighten me from my position. Bad as my people are, I think the picture is a little overcoloured. But do you see how late it is? this is the day, you know, we are to honour Mr. Wickham with

our company, and Mrs. Wilson will have a nervous fever if we are not at Langton precisely at the hour and minute mentioned on the card."

"That gamekeeper," remarked Mr. Hartfield, as Carry closed her work-box, and Cecil returned her drawing to its portfolio, "is a fine fellow; not of this country, I believe?"

"No," replied Miss Moubray, "he is from Selwood. Lord St. Maur considered the former head gamekeeper too infirm to be of any use, and discharging him with a pension, placed one of his own keepers here. I believe he has a very high opinion of Mathews."

"I don't wonder at it," rejoined Mr. Hartfield; "it is some time since I have seen a countenance which has pleased me so much. Open, frank, good humoured; there is a stamp of honest worth about him, too,—that sort of true nobility of mind which commands respect even in the lowest. By the bye, is it true Lord St. Maur is likely to marry Lady Newrystown?"

"I have heard so."

“ She is a fine woman; but I should have thought he would have had too much sense to throw himself away on so notorious a coquette. No money either. Well, well, it is strange what foolish things men will sometimes do when they’re in love.”

“ Yes,” replied his lady, “ and, unhappily, it is for such persons as Lady Newrystown that men do these foolish things. How is it, Edward, that the unprincipled of our sex exercise so much stronger an influence over yours than the amiable ?”

“ Because they take more pains to please us, I suppose. But go and dress; I hate being late, myself.”

In consequence of Mrs. Wilson’s fidgets, and the speed with which the coachman drove (coachmen always drive fast when there is no occasion for it), they arrived at Langton before the owner had completed his toilette; and as they were ushered into the drawing-room by one door, beheld a flying housemaid make her

exit by another. Mrs. Wilson, who had a very great objection to remaining quiet, after having settled her head-dress by the chimney looking glass, seated herself successively on three different chairs, as if to ascertain their various qualifications ; Caroline turned over the leaves of a botanical work ; and Cecil, at the open window, acted as cicerone to Mr. Hartfield.

“ And what,” he asked, after they had been thus engaged for a short space,—“ what is that dismal-looking place we see yonder to the right of those beech trees ?”

“ That,” replied Miss Moubrey, with a half smile, “ is Eldersleigh ; do you not recognise its forest of chimneys ?”

“ Eldersleigh ? Bless my soul, I beg ten thousand pardons. Eldersleigh ? Surely we cannot mean the same place.”

“ Do not apologize. Eldersleigh *is* a very dismal-looking place.”

“ It certainly is not as cheerful as Langton,” said Caroline, in a very meaning tone. “ Pshaw,”

replied her husband, who thought she had done anything but rectify his mistake; “there can be no comparison between them. This is a mere modern box, run up within the last fifty years, while Eldersleigh is venerable from its antiquity, and imposing from its size.”

“Granted,” rejoined Caroline, “yet the mere box would prove, in my estimation, a very comfortable residence; one at least I should prefer to Eldersleigh, although I am partial, very partial, to that dear, picturesque old mansion. Confess, Cecil, that these rooms are cheerful, well furnished, and that, with an agreeable companion, a winter evening here might pass pleasantly away. You will not answer me; come, tell me now, what is wanting?”

“Much,” replied Miss Moubray, looking round the room, which was evidently only occasionally used, and, for the obvious reason of Mr. Wickham’s being a bachelor, was deficient in *nicknackeries*.

“Yes,” replied Caroline, “this room requires

to be constantly inhabited ; and there should be musical instruments, work-boxes, and so on ; all which deficiencies would be supplied were there a lady at the head of the establishment. But these are only trifles ; I am speaking of the house itself ; what fault do you find there ?”

“ It wants a conservatory.”

“ An easy addition.”

“ True,” a conservatory might be built without much difficulty ; but the taste for flowers could not be bestowed with the same facility.”

“ Why do you lay such a stress upon the love of flowers ?”

“ Because, in a man, I consider it an evidence of a refined mind, or perhaps I should rather say,” she added, in a lower tone of voice, “ because I love flowers so passionately myself ; and I think similarity of taste in a companion more essential to happiness than even congeniality of temper. How can persons live happily together unless their tastes and pursuits agree ?”

“ But,” said Caroline, “ tastes, as well as

habits, may be acquired ; and depend upon it, if Mr. Wickham's wife likes flowers, a conservatory will be very speedily built."

Cecil's answer was prevented by the master of the house, who came, blushing, into the room.

Some persons profess to like bachelors' parties, for there is, they say, less of formality at such entertainments, and therefore more enjoyment. As far as concerns the guests, this may, perhaps, be true ; but let no single man who values his comfort venture on large dinner parties, unless, indeed, his establishment be of the Chatsworth description, where nothing can go wrong, or his nerves of the strongest order. Neither was Mr. Wickham's case ; and his natural timidity being a thousand-fold increased by his anxiety that everything should appear to advantage in Miss Moubray's eyes, he became downright awkward. Never were good intentions more completely frustrated, and seldom a more stupid dinner party. Caroline, indeed, exerted herself to make something like conversation, but as she

had lived abroad for the last five years, and her neighbours knew no more of the continent than might be gained in a six weeks' trip to Paris, it was impossible to get on.

Lady Middleton was always a silent member of society ; she thought it ungenteel to talk. Cecil, placed between Mr. Hartfield and Sir John Middleton (the individual who, benefiting by General Moubray's opportune illness, was now one of the county representatives), underwent a cross fire of politics ; and Miss Middleton tenderly flirted with a young Cantab. Mrs. Wilson, certainly, was exceedingly lively and chatty ; for a dinner party, where she was treated with marked civility by the owner of the house, was cause of great enjoyment to her ; but unluckily, towards the close of the repast, she was indebted to a clumsy servant for a bath of champagne mousseux. Poor Mr. Wickham was horror-struck, and the lady betrayed her vexation at the accident with more warmth than good

breeding ; nor could she for some time recover her composure.

The ladies retired to the drawing-room, when Cecil, dreading a discourse on the awkwardness and other sins and imperfections of servants (a theme on which Mrs. Wilson, like most persons who have the annoyance of limited means, was uncommonly eloquent), contrived to intimate her intention of repairing the mischief. The clouds instantly disappeared from Mrs. Wilson's countenance, and she became as gay and garrulous as before the misfortune. Indeed, in the plenitude of her high spirits, and perhaps having unwittingly taken rather more wine than usual (for she was a person of extremely temperate habits), not content with being pleased and entertained herself, she seemed to think it necessary to entertain others—in short, to do the honours of the house ; and a very great mistake it was ; for Lady Middleton, being a cousin of Mr. Wickham's, conceived that if any lady assumed

that prerogative it should be herself; while the Honourable Mrs. Skepton, a young lively widow, who entertained hopes of being Mrs. Wickham some day or other, thought it equally an infringement on her future rights; and neither lady was inclined to view the encroachment more favourably from the circumstance that the person who thus boldly interfered with their claims was nothing but companion to Miss Moubrey, herself an unmarried woman.

Lady Middleton, having in vain attempted to look the offender into her proper place, and finding that even the most obstinate silence failed to put a stop to her well-meaning but misplaced civilities, suddenly rose from her seat, leaving the good lady sitting alone upon the sofa, at liberty to finish her sentence or not. Mrs. Wilson looked surprised, and not a little hurt; but as Lady Middleton was not famous for the urbanity of her manners, she did not profit by the lesson. On the contrary, after maintaining her awkward position for a minute or two, she

crossed the room, and, approaching the table where Mrs. Skepton and Miss Middleton were standing, placed a volume she had dislodged from the bookcase before them, with the smiling assurance that the prints it contained were worthy their inspection. A look of wonder was the sole acknowledgment of this attention ; then, having exchanged glances, both ladies moved suddenly away, leaving the discomfited Mrs. Wilson again sola. This time there could be no mistake ; she felt the rudeness was intentional, and, bridling up, turned to the engravings ; while, to increase her mortification, two gentlemen, who then entered from the dining-room, after pausing for a minute to look at the book, passed on, without condescending to address her even in the most cursory manner.

Miss Moubrey, who had been a painful witness of the whole scene, however she had deprecated Mrs. Wilson's forwardness, could not but pity her evident discomposure, and would have

joined her, but was so hemmed in that she found it impossible to extricate herself. Wickham, however, was now in the room, and, as though he had divined Cecil's wishes, or suspected the impertinence Mrs. Wilson had been subject to, drew a chair by hers, and during the remainder of the evening paid her the most marked attention. Cecil felt absolutely grateful, and in her admiration at the independence of character and good feeling he thus displayed, no longer thought him awkward, or deficient in refinement; and when, on handing her to the carriage, he timidly mentioned his fears that, judging from that evening, Mrs. Hartfield would receive but an unfavourable impression of English society, she expressed the gratification she had derived with so much warmth and earnestness, that Wickham, who had hitherto looked upon her as a being he might love, but never hope to win, for the first time asked himself whether indeed the case were desperate?

He was keenly alive to the difficulties he had to contend with ; he saw in their true light all his disadvantages ; but *circumstances* were in his favour ; and if to circumstances man must sometimes bow, how much more woman ? To her affection he did not at present venture to aspire ; but could esteem and regard be once awakened, might not time and constant assiduity do the rest ? He thought it might—he thought it would ; and the event proved——. But we must not anticipate. Many things combined in Mr. Wickham's favour. Her friendless, unprotected situation, from their relative positions, naturally made her lean on him : nor could he have been seen to greater advantage.

Among the great and noble, Wickham had been nobody ; among the sons of genius, nothing ; in the restricted circle of mere fashion, perhaps looked down upon ; but as a country gentleman residing on his property, devoting himself to the welfare of his tenants, and sedulously fulfilling

every duty, it was impossible to know and not esteem him. With the exception, too, of Mr. Ashford, a hair-brained, fox-hunting young man, who, it was generally believed, had already been rejected by Miss Moubrey, he was the only *eligible* in that part of the country.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days previous to the Hartfields leaving Eldersleigh, Caroline again entreated Cecil to accompany them, and urged her wishes with so much affectionate importunity, that Miss Moubrey found no alternative but to acknowledge her anxiety to avoid meeting Lord St. Maur. This naturally led to inquiries as to the cause of this wish ; and many a shade of bitter feeling passed over her expressive countenance, as she gave the mortifying recital of all her sorrows and his unkindness.

But Caroline viewed the matter in quite ano-

ther light ; for as the spectators round a chess table often see more of the game than do the players themselves, she at once perceived her friend's mistake. Lord St. Maur had evidently loved her ; but a change of manner, apparently arising solely from her altered fortunes, had probably disgusted him ; and under these circumstances it was not strange he should have fallen a prey to Eleanor's allurements. She thought that Cecil's leaving Selwood so immediately upon her coming of age, and thus throwing off his protection, fully justified the indifference which had marked their parting ; and that he had neglected to inform her of Mary's illness, might surely be attributed to the anxiety and confusion of the moment.

“Indeed, Cecil,” she said, after having stated her opinion, “I do not think he is at all to blame. How could you expect a man of Lord St. Maur's rank and pretensions to act otherwise, or to submit to what must have appeared

to him (to say the least of it) most inexcusable caprice? My dear friend, why did you change your manner?"

"Caroline, how could I help it? How could I go on fawning upon a man who had refused to marry me?"

"Mason ought never to have told you what took place at Cheltenham; nor should you, Cecil, have believed her. In the first place, there may not be one word of truth in her account; and even if there were, you should not have acted upon it. While he continued to treat you with respect and kindness, you were wrong to adopt a haughty carriage towards him; indeed, my love, you were. But after all, I see no reason why you should not come to Naples; you have, I am sure, taken ample pains to convince your guardian of your dislike to him; besides, you know, he is otherwise disposed of; and although on Lady Mary's account you may meet sometimes, there *can* be no

danger now of a recurrence of his former feelings. So tell me how soon your arrangements can be completed."

"And you really think Lord St. Maur loved me, Caroline?"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it."

"No, no, I cannot believe it; I dare not hope it; I am not worthy of his love," cried Cecil, passionately. Then, after a brief pause, while Mrs. Hartfield looked at her in mute astonishment — "Still, still, you may be right; there were some things which always puzzled me. But if it be so, Carry, oh, I have madly cast away my own happiness!" Then, precipitately leaving the apartment, she sought her own chamber, and burying her head in the pillows of the bed, gave way to all her agony of grief.

"My poor, poor Cecil," said Caroline (who followed her), as, softly passing her arm round Cecil's slender waist, she raised her from her drooping posture and placed her head upon her

shoulder. “Look up, dearest, speak to me; oh, what shall I do for you; how comfort you, my sweet friend?”

“Caroline,” said Miss Moubrey, with an expression of intense grief, “did you know what it is to feel I once possessed the love of such a man as Lord St. Maur, and that I lost it—lost it by my own folly—but for that, I might have been with him now, have comforted him under his heavy trial; and Mary, too, my affectionate Mary, whom I shall never see again.”

“Do not give way to such forebodings, Cecil; Mary may yet recover; Lord St. Maur learn how much he has been mistaken; all may yet go well.”

“No, Carry; if ever he did love me, it is all past—long, long ago. He hates me now; he despises me; thinks me selfish, mercenary, heartless; all that is base and mean.”

“Not so, Cecil; not so. Lord St. Maur can never think that of you; and though he be in error now, it will not last, indeed, it will not.

Truth will prevail, and then his affection for you will be greater than before."

" Do not mock me, Carry, pray do not. These are false hopes ; they never can be realized ; and even should he learn the truth, it would be too late now, for he is hopelessly entangled with Lady Newrystown. The engagement is notorious."

" But were that the case, Cecil, did this barrier exist between you, do not, I entreat you, give way to despondency. There is, believe me, there is yet happiness in store for you."

" Happiness ! Caroline."

" Yes, dearest, happiness. You know not what changes time may effect ; even to bringing back your former cheerfulness."

" No, Caroline, the tree that has been scathed by lightning blooms no more ; nor shall I ever be again what once I was. And I deserve my lot ; yes, deserve it, for my pride and selfishness."

" My dearest Cecil, do not judge yourself

thus harshly; not even your bitterest enemy, if you could have an enemy, might tax you with being selfish."

"And yet it was selfishness that brought on me this severe trial; for had I consulted his feelings instead of listening only to my own, I should have feared to wound him; and then the misunderstanding never could have taken place. Oh! I was wrong, very, very wrong, and I well merit all I now suffer. But Caroline, is it not strange that none of this occurred to me before? And though it wrung my heart to part from Mary as I did, I never for an instant doubted I was acting right in leaving Selwood; nor, indeed, do I see now, how, placed as I was, I could have remained; for, in addition to the misery of witnessing his devotion to his cousin, I really thought he wished me gone."

"I do not think you were at all to blame in leaving Selwood; your error, which, after all was merely one of judgment, was of an earlier

date. From the time Lord St. Maur attached himself to Lady Newrystown, it was both your duty and your policy to shun his presence."

Much more did Caroline say, hoping to comfort and reconcile her friend to circumstances so singularly trying, and to heal a wound she most unconsciously had rendered doubly painful; and Cecil, who had no wish to indulge in a morbid state of feeling, or to increase sorrow, for which she knew there was no remedy but time and resignation, became gradually calm. And when, after a short interval of repose, she returned to the drawing-room, not only had all traces of her agitation disappeared, but there was even a slight approach to cheerfulness in her countenance; something of soothing mingled with her grief, and took away its bitterness. Lord St. Maur had loved her; the painful reflection, therefore, that she had given her young affection to one who valued not the gift had lost its sting; and she felt assured that constant exertion to keep the subject from her mind, with a

sedulous attention to the duties of her station, in themselves of a more stirring and engrossing nature than those usually pertaining to a woman's lot, would eventually restore peace.

Excepting an earnest request from Cecil of entire secrecy, there was no further reference to the subject until the morning fixed on for the Hartfields' departure ; when Miss Moubrey entered her friend's room, and put into her hand a note, so valuable as to startle the prudent Caroline, who would have declined the gift.

“ Nay, dearest Caroline, you must not refuse me the gratification of giving a few toys to my little godson ; you know I am an irresponsible person—an old maid, whom no one can call to account or scold ; and Moubrey must not forget his godmamma.”

“ If he could forget you, Cecil, he would be an exception to the whole world,” replied Mrs. Hartfield.

“ Please Ma'am,” said the nurse, “ Mr. Hartfield says the carriage will be round directly,

and hopes you wont be long. Is Master Hartfield to wear his new pelisse and hat? I'm afraid, if he does, they wont be fit to be seen by the time we reach home."

"No, to be sure not," replied Mrs. Hartfield.

"Yes, Mou. will, Mou. will," cried the child, suiting the action to the word by seizing the hat.

"Indeed Mou. will do no such thing," said his mamma, extricating it from his grasp.

"Then Mou. cry;" and there was a deafening roar, silenced only by the threat of an appeal to Mr. Hartfield. "How strange it is, people cannot keep their children quiet," thought Cecil, walking to the window, where she remained until the storm was quelled, and the nursery-maid gone to perform some of her multifarious duties; for she was the Hartfields' only domestic.

"Caroline," said Miss Moubrey, approaching her friend, "you will, I fear, think me very weak, very foolish, when I tell you how much one painful circumstance respecting *him* presses

upon my mind. To his marriage I can be reconciled, for I will try to think it will promote his happiness ; I can forgive his anxiety to separate Mary from me, because I am confident it is Lady Newrystown who has urged him to it ; and his unkindness to me calls for no resentment, since it was no more than my own folly provoked ; but, that he should despise, look down upon me, think me capricious, mercenary, unfeeling—this, this I cannot bear. Now, they will be at Naples, and you will meet—perhaps be intimate ; and if, without betraying my weak partiality, you could make him understand that I was influenced, misled, prejudiced, in short, anything but what I must have appeared. Do you think, dearest friend, you could do me this favour ? You know not the relief it would give my mind.” Caroline wrung Cecil’s hand in token of her readiness. “ But you must be cautious, very, very cautious ; on no account would I have him even guess the truth.”

“ Lord St. Maur,” replied Caroline, “ shall

not hear one word from me you would not yourself have spoken ; and you, my dearest Cecil, must not give way to desponding thoughts. Believe me, my own love, time will work a cure ; there is even such a thing as ‘second love.’ ”

“ Not for me, Caroline. This ill-starred attachment will, I know, pass away ; their very hopelessness will save me from a long endurance of my present feelings ; but others of the same description will not, cannot, take their place.”

“ At any rate, you will not shut out all idea of marrying, even supposing what you say were true.”

“ I am in the hands of One that cannot err ; and in the path He chooses for me I hope to walk. And you must not be uneasy about me ; I know that to you, happy in your husband and your children, my existence appears desolate and sad ; but remember, Caroline, that be our lot cast in happiness or sorrow, man’s appointed days on earth are few.”

But Cecil's tone and manner, far from dispelling Caroline's uneasiness, served but to heighten it. Herself entirely devoid of enthusiasm, Mrs. Hartfield could not understand the fervency of her companion's feelings ; and she trembled at what appeared to her an overwrought state of mind, which, unless duly controlled, might lead to very serious results. Again, when she compared the faded, fragile being, who then stood before her, with the once gay and brilliant Cecil Moubray, a dark foreboding crossed her thoughts. Like some light skiff tossed on the angry waves, might she not sink beneath the storm ? But change of scene and place might yet do much ; therefore, although in some respects contrary to her judgment, Mrs. Hartfield resolved once more to entreat her to accompany them to Naples.

“ Cecil,” she said, “ I have foreborne again to urge my wishes, for it seemed almost selfish, respecting Naples ; but, you know, we do not leave England for some days ; and if you would

grant me this favour, you might join us either at Sir John Hartfield's or in London?"

"Oh, Carry, if you love me, do not again ask me; you know not how much it would cost me to be in the same place with them; besides, I think there would be almost indelicacy in my placing myself in his way. At any rate, until I can meet him with perfect indifference, I ought not to risk an interview. And, dearest, although I will not deny that Mr. Hartfield has frightened me not a little, by all he said the other day, and has put me terribly out of conceit with Eldersleigh, still, I hardly believe I ought to go from home for any length of time, until my schools, and other little arrangements, are more matured. But next year, Caroline, none of these objections will be valid, and then, if you will have me, I shall only be too happy to join you."

An impatient summons from Mr. Hartfield here cut short the conversation, and the friends parted. Mr. Hartfield travelled outside; his

lady, with her two children, nursemaid, and the usual accompaniments of band-boxes and bundles, occupied the interior of the carriage; but amidst all the discomfort and noise, Caroline felt that, notwithstanding its drawbacks, hers was a fairer lot than Cecil Moubrey's. And when she caught a glimpse of Langton, with its large French windows, trim lawns, and neat lodge, most ardently did she wish she could think of Cecil as likely soon to become the mistress of so eligible a residence. Perhaps she would not have considered such an event quite beyond the bounds of probability had she known the pleasure Miss Moubrey was at that moment receiving from Mr. Wickham's society. She had felt her friend's departure with much keenness; it is always so melancholy to be left behind. She found it impossible to employ herself; her mind and thoughts were ever with the travellers. Never had Eldersleigh appeared so gloomy, nor Mrs. Wilson more tiresome; altogether, therefore, Mr. Wickham's visit

proved a very seasonable interruption, and when he had taken leave, and Cecil on looking at her watch perceived it had been extended considerably beyond an hour, she thought it one of the shortest hours she had ever spent.

CHAPTER VI.

SHORTLY after came a letter from Anna, to remind Miss Moubrey of her promise of visiting Westfield ; and Cecil, hoping the change would assist in dispelling the gloom which, since Caroline's departure, had fastened on her spirits even more deeply than before, readily consented to fulfil the engagement. Leaving, therefore, Miss Styleigh installed at Eldersleigh as companion to Mrs. Wilson during her absence, she set off for —shire. But she greatly erred in judgment ; for while the return to old familiar scenes and people could not but

heighten old feelings and remembrances, it was doubly sorrowful to miss from amongst the large family party the three individuals she most esteemed and loved; and although welcomed by Lady Emily and her youngest daughter with more than kindness, she soon felt herself an isolated being. They were all too full of their own pursuits and pleasures to care for her. Anna and Mr. Thornborough, still the newly-married couple, could think of little beyond themselves; Lady Emily had abundance to occupy her thoughts in directing Louisa's nursery and Anna's establishment; and Mr. Lawson being absent professionally, his wife divided her time oddly enough, between nursing her baby and flirting with Mr. Coxe Fellowes.

William Beauclerc, who was now master of Firgrove, in consequence of Mrs. Henrietta's long expected demise having occurred, resided there altogether; and on learning that Cecil was to spend a fortnight at Westfield, came over,

as she thought, for the express purpose of teasing her, so exceedingly disagreeable did he contrive to be.

No one has a right to be disagreeable ; and yet how numerous the class, and great the variety, of *bores*. To say nothing of the practical joker, so admirably described by one of the most brilliant writers of the day, there is the systematic punster, who plays upon your every second word. The man who makes a point of contradicting everything you say, who is perpetually putting you right, although, in fact, he knows nothing at all about the matter ; who, if you happen to complain of heat, assures you that a fire is absolutely necessary, for that it freezes in the shade ; and if you say the day is cold, forthwith throws up a window ; who laughs when you tell a pathetic tale, and listens to your attempt at mirth with the expression of an undertaker's mute. Then comes the witty man, who makes you the butt of his impertinence ; the talkative man, in whose pre-

sence no one else can edge in a word (a very serious offender when ladies are present); the silent man, who never goes beyond a mono-syllable; the deaf man (not he who suffers from infirmity, but he), who, from inattention, indolence, or absence of mind, requires the repetition of every word; and to conclude, although I have not half gone through my list—there is the man who, like William Beauclerc, delights in saying what he knows will be unwelcome. Happily, the last-mentioned are not common, and the usages of society prevent their being as obnoxious as they would like to be.

Mrs. Henrietta's death caused no surprise, inasmuch as it had been long anticipated; but her Will did occasion very considerable astonishment and dissatisfaction to all the numerous expectants, excepting, indeed, to the person principally benefited by the disposal of her property,—to wit, Mr. Beauclerc; who, in addition to Firgrove, received as residuary legatee

upwards of twenty thousand pounds. The rest of the much-wished-for thirty thousand being, with the exception of five to Mrs. Falkland, disposed of in annuities, charitable donations, and small legacies. Eleanor's name had been inserted for fifteen thousand, but was erased. Among the bequests were, three of one hundred pounds each (for mourning rings), to Lord St. Maur, his sister, and Sir Thomas Warham, the latter, Lady Emily gravely assured Cecil, in consequence of Mrs. Henrietta's having entertained a tender penchant for the worthy baronet, who was, however, about twenty years her junior.

“Have you any commands for Selwood, Lady Emily?” said Mr. Beauclerc, entering the drawing room, with an open letter in his hand. “I must ride over this morning, and shall be happy if I can be useful.”

“Oh, dear, yes, I have a great many messages to Selwood. I want to speak to Brown of

all things. But why are you going this morning? It was only the other day you were there."

"Yes, but I have a letter from Naples, and must speak to the workmen."

"A letter from my brother!" cried Lady Emily, stretching out her hand involuntarily.

"No, not from Lord St. Maur," said William, coolly folding the letter; "it is from Eleanor."

"And what account of Mary?" inquired the rebuked Lady Emily.

"Nothing particular; she continues much the same; one day a little better, the next worse. But I must be off; so, if you will be kind enough to write your message, I will deliver the note."

"Oh, I shall never be able to write; I have a hundred things to say; and servants are so stupid they never understand written orders."

"Mamma, what is to hinder our driving over to Selwood? The day is so beautiful, it would be quite a pleasant expedition; and I want some

flowers for Friday; you know we have none here."

"An excellent idea, Anna," said Beauclerc, "I will order my phaeton directly. Miss Moubray, you will not object to an open carriage, I hope?"

Miss Moubray felt very much inclined to object; but as everybody else was eager for the excursion, and she had no pretext for remaining behind, she was obliged to conceal her reluctance, and in a short time they set off, Lady Emily and Louisa in the chariot, the Thornboroughs on horseback, and Cecil driven by William Beauclerc.

Such a cavalcade could not pass through a small country town without attracting some degree of notice; and as Mr. Coxe Fellowes happened to make one among the group of gentlemen lounging about the door of the reading rooms, one of the ladies occupying the chariot felt more pleasure than surprise when a horse's hoofs were heard clattering along the road. Her mamma was of a different opinion.

“ I declare there’s Mr. Coxe Fellowes ! How very odd, I thought I saw him talking to Lord Piercefield as we drove through L——. I hope he is not coming our way, at any rate ; I declare I’m afraid he is going to join us ; Louisa, you really must keep him more at a distance.” And, for once, Lady Emily returned the salutation of a handsome, rich young man, with a look of gravity almost amounting to displeasure.

Mr. Coxe Fellowes took the hint, and, quickening his pace, rode up to the side of the phaeton, and addressed Cecil, who easily forgave him a cloud of dust, in consideration of the deliverance from what was to her so very obnoxious,—the necessity of maintaining a conversation with Mr. Beauclerc. After they had entered the park, however, thinking perhaps he had done with duty, and might return to pleasure, Mr. Coxe Fellowes fell back, and having exchanged a sentence or two with Anna, reined in his horse on Louisa’s side of the carriage. Beauclerc looked round, and finding the coast clear, ob-

served, with apparent indifference, and probably by way of revenge for the evident readiness with which Miss Moubray had greeted their late companion,—

“I suppose you have heard this report of my sister’s marriage?”

“You mean with Lord St. Maur?”

“It is to that,” he replied, “that I allude.”

“I have often heard the engagement spoken of as a settled thing.”

“And do you believe it?”

“Certainly,” she answered; “is there any reason why I should not?”

“I know of none; unless, indeed, the reluctance that we shew to believe what is at variance with our own wishes.”

“You are quite mistaken, Mr. Beauclerc, if you imagine I have any wish which could militate against Lord St. Maur’s happiness.”

“You think, then, that he really is attached to Eleanor?”

“There appears no reason to doubt it; and

the marriage will put the fact beyond a question."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus calmly on the subject," he said, looking full at Cecil; but she no longer quailed beneath his glance; for since the conversation with Caroline, her feelings on this point were materially changed. There was no disgrace in loving a man who had loved her. Her colour therefore was not heightened, nor her voice hurried, as she replied,—

"I have no reason to speak otherwise than calmly, and I assure you I sincerely hope that when the marriage does take place, it will prove a happy one."

"And can you really tolerate my sister after her triumph? You are positively more amiable than I imagined you to be—perfectly angelic."

"Where there was no contest, could there be a triumph?"

"There was, at any rate, desertion! Can you forgive *that*?"

"None whatever," she replied, in a firm tone,

and I again repeat, Lord St. Maur has my best wishes for his happiness."

"Oh that you would extend that friendly feeling to another, dear Miss Moubrey, who has long loved and valued you, but from utter hopelessness has hitherto been silent. Would you, could you, but believe in the attachment—"

"Mr. Beauclerc," interrupted Cecil, "this is really too much. I must entreat this subject is never again alluded to."

"On my life, I am sorry to have vexed you by mentioning it at all," said he, entirely throwing off the tender inflexion of voice which had marked his last address. I'm really quite provoked I was fool enough to meddle in the business. But, at any rate, you will, I am sure, allow me to soften your refusal when I transmit it to St. Maur."

"Lord St. Maur!" exclaimed Cecil, quite thrown off her guard.

"No, not *Lord* St. Maur," replied Beauclerc, with a gleam of fiendlike pleasure on his really

handsome features. “It was not *Lord*, but Colonel St. Maur’s cause that I wished to advocate. *Lord* St. Maur,” he continued, sneeringly, “is otherwise provided for ; the marriage you assure me has your best wishes. But to return to my client ; you are so kind, and gentle, and considerate, that I am certain you will be anxious to spare him all unnecessary pain, and therefore give me a *carte blanche*, when I convey the intelligence of his failure, to throw in some of those pretty sentiments, which are, you know, customary on these occasions, and quite unmeaning ; such as ‘being honoured by his choice ;’ ‘touched by his constancy ;’ ‘fully alive to all his excellences ;’ but that at present you entertain no wish to change your lot ? May I not say something of this kind ? It is bad policy to make an enemy of any one ; and rejected men are sometimes apt to be bitter. But, perhaps, as you did not rightly understand me, Colonel St. Maur is not to be considered in that light.”

Cecil was fairly perplexed ; she was well as-

sured that, since his refusal, upwards of two years ago, Colonel St. Maur had never given her a second thought. But she knew, also, that Beauclerc, from his inveterate love of mischief, was quite capable of transmitting a fabricated message.

“ You do not answer,” he said ; “ surely, surely it cannot be displeasure at his persevering in admiring you that seals your lips ? ”

“ If Colonel St. Maur *has* deputed you to make this overture, I can only remark, it causes me both surprise and regret ; it is not what I should have expected from him. Nor can I consider myself called upon to return any answer whatever, unless he thinks proper to make a direct communication with me ; which, allow me to add, I think very improbable.”

“ Hem ! what a fool I’ve been,” thought William, as he lashed and at the same moment reined in his horses, until the fiery animals became almost ungovernable ; and Cecil thought herself fortunate in escaping an overturn.

Why did Beauclerc make that foolish declaration? Perhaps he would have found it difficult himself to answer the question; but although not a little mortified by this rebuff, he had at any rate the pleasure of knowing that, in spite of assumed indifference and boasted calmness, Cecil, whom he now absolutely hated, was still attached to Lord St. Maur. Nothing more passed until they reached Selwood, when, amidst the usual expressions of “delightful drive,” “lovely weather,” “beautiful country,” the ladies were assisted to alight.

One of the grooms had ridden forward to announce their approach, and as the distance from Westfield was pretty considerable, and the morning already far advanced, it was decided they should at once recruit their fatigue by seating themselves at the well-furnished luncheon table they found awaiting them. And the jest, and the laugh, and the smile, went round, as, with careless merriment, they feasted on the dainties spread before them. Cecil smiled, too, for Beau-

clerc's eye was on her ; but hers was the smile of an aching heart, for she thought of those who were far away. The repast concluded, the light-hearted party separated, and, after casually inspecting the improvements that were in progress, dispersed themselves about the grounds.

It was the season of the year when autumn reigns, but as yet only the *beauty* of decay appeared ; the trees, although presenting each variety of tint, from the rich crimson to the sickly straw, were still luxuriantly clad. The myrtles, fuschias, and other late flowering shrubs, were still in full blossom ; a few feathery clouds chequered the deep blue sky ; and the light breeze but slightly curled the surface of the lake, whose glassy bosom, as though to multiply a scene thus fair, threw back, in bright reflection, each glowing tint, each fleecy cloud, and glittering sunbeam, with a fidelity mocking the limner's art. Oh Autumn ! season of the changing leaf, the shortening day, I love thee not. Full well I know that to the painter's eye thy

picturesque magnificence is dear ; and poets, too, have sung thy fading loveliness ; still to me the sapless branch, and the crisp, rustling foliage, do ever speak of sorrow and of death, of perished hopes and withered expectations ; and thy gay hues remind me of departing friends, dearer, because we know that we must lose them soon ; and therefore, Autumn, gorgeously-apparelled Autumn, thou hast few charms for me !

It was, perhaps, in a similar frame of mind that Cecil lingered behind her volatile companions until she was alone, and glad to be so, that she might indulge the melancholy reflections the scene around her conjured up. There were the swans Mary had loved to watch and feed ; that walk led to the plot of ground where she was wont to exercise her horticultural propensities ; where rose trees in full bearing were planted, in the expectation that they would flourish ; where slips of geranium and verbina were put into the ground one day and pulled up the next, to ascertain whether they had taken

root. There, too, was the favourite seat, cool, dark, and shady, where Cecil and her little cousin had so often sat together ; and the exotics, (some of which, owing to the mildness of the season, had been transferred from the conservatory to the terrace,) had formerly been objects of great interest and pride to Lord St. Maur ; for, unlike Mr. Wickham, he was exceedingly fond of flowers.

She was interrupted by Mr. Thornborough, who came to tell her the carriages were waiting, and hastily plucking a branch from a geranium raised at Selwood, and an especial favourite of the Earl's, she hurried off.

On reaching the hall door, she found, with no small pleasure, that a change of arrangements had taken place. The phaeton having driven off without her, she became Lady Emily's companion, a pleasure which at first appeared mutual, but on ascending a gentle acclivity, the Thornboroughs cantered by the carriage, and from that moment her ladyship became exceed-

ingly uneasy ; she put her head out of one window, leant over towards the other, looked backwards, forwards, in the bottom of the carriage,—in short, gave every evidence of having discovered an omission, and Cecil was in momentary expectation of hearing they must turn or send back.

“ You miss something, Lady Emily ?” she asked, at length ; “ can I assist you ?”

“ No, my dear, thank you ; it’s nothing of any consequence,” replied that lady ; and then, after another glance, east, west, north, and south, added, “ But do tell me if you can see anything of Mr. Coxe Fellowes ?” (Cecil could not.) “ It’s very strange ? We can’t have set out without him, surely ; I hope to goodness he’s not riding by Louisa. Oh, there is the phaeton ! then what can have become of Mr. Coxe Fellowes ? Francis, Francis !” cried her ladyship, with her head out of the window ; “ how odd it is I can’t make him hear : George, do tell Mr. Thornborough I want to speak to him.”

Mr. Thornborough rode back, and, in answer

to her inquiries, informed her that William Beauclerc, not having finished his business with the workmen, had begged Mr. Coxe Fellowes to take his place in the phaeton, which fully accounted for Louisa's transfer from one vehicle to the other.

“Very foolish, indeed,” cried Lady Emily; and exceedingly wrong of Beauclerc. Francis, pray send on the groom, and desire them to stop until we come up, that I may change places with Louisa.”

Francis thought it more advisable to have nothing to do with such an arrangement; so, bowing, as though in acquiescence, he rejoined his wife without giving the order.

“Very wrong, indeed—highly reprehensible,” continued Lady Emily, in a tone of much vexation; “and if Lawson should be arrived when we return, we shall have a terrible scene. He was jealous enough before, and now, I suppose, there will be no pacifying him: I’m sure I don’t know what the consequences will be. Beauclerc

ought on no account to have asked Mr. Coxe Fellowes to drive ; but it's quite unaccountable how selfish and disagreeable he's grown lately. You saw how strange he was about that letter this morning."

" I'm afraid the account of Mary is but indifferent."

" To say the truth, my dear Cecil, I never place much dependence on what Eleanor says about sickness. You remember what a fuss she made about Newrystown's influenza last winter. I dare say Mary's illness was very little more than a convenient excuse. They wanted to go abroad ; clandestine marriages, you know, are so much more easily managed there than at home."

" Marriage !" cried Cecil ; " Do you, then, imagine them to be already married ?"

" There is, I fear, but little doubt of it."

" Has Lord St. Maur——?"

" I can't exactly say my brother has acknowledged it ; but that is nothing to the purpose ;

Horace was always reserved ; but when I spoke to Mrs. Falkland on the subject, she did not even attempt to contradict me : and did you not observe how William ordered about everything at the Castle ?—just as if he had been it's master. What, too, are these directions, which it seemed were so very important, and certainly came in a letter from Eleanor ? Besides, if she had not been pretty sure of my brother, do you think she would have been fool enough to displease Mrs. Henrietta by going abroad, when it was very well known the old lady could not live many weeks ?”

“ Did Mrs. Beauclerc object ?”

“ Most decidedly ; and told Eleanor (so, at least, I have heard lately) that if she persevered in going, she must expect nothing from her ; and no wonder, for it was both indecorous and unfeeling.”

Mary disliked Lady Newrystown so very much, that, in her present dangerous state of health, I should have thought Lord St. Maur

would hardly have risked distressing her by marrying."

"Very likely Mary knows nothing at all about it; besides, she altered very much after you were gone, and became quite partial to Eleanor. You know it's very often the way with children; first a fancy is taken to one person, then to another."

"My poor Mary," thought Cecil, sadly reverting to their last interview; "my sweet, affectionate child, you have remembered my injunction only too well!"

Lady Emily put down the carriage window. "Cecil, are you quite wise in keeping those flowers so near you? I assure you there's nothing so bad for the complexion as strong scents, and I really think you are even paler than when we left Selwood."

"I believe it is foolish, very foolish, perhaps even wrong." Miss Moubray raised the flower as she spoke; for one moment she inhaled its spicy fragrance—one little second pressed it to

her faded lip ; a glittering tear fell on the graceful petal—one farewell glance—and then it lay beneath the chariot wheels. A beggar woman found the drooping flower, and gave it to her child to still his cries ; the hushed infant, caught with the brightness of its hues, screamed with delight, and clapped his tiny hands, while the pleased mother smiled as she watched his happiness. But soon the blossom faded, and was thrown aside. And such is the epitome of human life ; some weep—some smile,—all, like that withered flower, fade and die.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY EMILY's apprehensions respecting Mr. Lawson proved correct: he had arrived at Westfield during their absence, and his countenance expressed anything but complacency, as Louisa, with heightened colour, laughing eyes, and every other indication of enjoyment, was driven up to the portico where he was standing. In fact, her want of reserve towards Mr. Coxe Fellowes had already given serious uneasiness to her husband, and as, in spite of his displeasure and Lady Emily's remonstrances, she persevered in encouraging her admirer, there

was only too much reason to believe that, led on by her silly vanity, this selfish being would eventually endanger her own respectability, and destroy the happiness of a really estimable man ; for such was Lawson, notwithstanding what Lady Emily called his plebeian notions respecting money, and which, in reality, were limited to the conscientious, though, it must be owned, unusual determination of living within his income.

These matrimonial disturbances did not increase the pleasure of Miss Moubray's séjour at Westfield, and it was with real satisfaction she saw the day arrive when her visit should terminate. In accordance with an arrangement framed a short time since with Elizabeth Hartfield, she made, in returning home, a circuit of some forty or fifty miles ; and having passed a couple of days at Sir John Hartfield's, again set off for Eldersleigh, accompanied by his eldest daughter, who had promised her a month, at least, of her society. They found, on arriving,

that Miss Styleigh had deserted her post; or, to speak more strictly, had been driven from it,—for three nights following, that young lady's rest having been so disturbed by mysterious, unearthly sounds, that, unable any longer to combat her fears, or remain at Eldersleigh, she had returned home. Elizabeth was highly amused by the account of Lydia's terror; and gaily assured Cecil, that, so far from sharing the alarm, she should feel no objection in the world even to occupy the supposed haunted room itself. But Mrs. Wilson evidently thought it no laughing matter; and when, after wishing Elizabeth good night, Miss Moubray repaired to her apartment, she found that self-important personage awaiting her with a countenance so replete with fear and gravity, that she held herself prepared to hear a long and well-authenticated ghost story. Had Mrs. Wilson received a visit from Mrs. Veal herself she could not have looked more awfully mysterious.

Her communication, however, related solely

to the probable effect on the servants, for she did not believe in ghosts; and although obliged to confess she also had been awaked by unusual noises, thought they might be traced to rats or wind. But the menials were unhappily not above superstitious fear; two of them, an under housemaid and a kitchenmaid, had already intimated their intention of “resigning,” should the old Baron think proper to repeat his visit; and, well aware how great is the prejudice of the lower orders against entering a house reported to be haunted, Mrs. Wilson feared there would be difficulty in filling the vacated places. Cecil, however, remembering how very efficacious her threatened appeal to Lord St. Maur had proved in postponing her relative’s appearance, saw little cause for anxiety, and informed Mrs. Wilson of her resolution of having the house searched by constables, in case there should be any further alarms.

“My dear Miss Moubray,” replied Mrs. Wilson, “I no more believe in ghosts than you do;

but that will not prevent these foolish servants from fancying all sorts of absurdities. And as for your idea of the police, I fear it would avail us nothing in such a house as this, full of dark closets, sliding panels, and trap doors; I never was in such a place before. I am sure I thought I knew them pretty well by this time, and yet it was but two days since I put my foot upon a trap door, and if Mason, who was standing by, hadn't caught me by the arm, I do believe I should have fallen through."

"I trust you were not hurt," said Cecil, with a half smile.

"Not at all; but the strange part of the story is, that afterwards, when, to prevent a repetition of the accident, I had the carpet (it was but a strip that went by the bedside), taken up, and the room thoroughly examined it was impossible to find the trap door, nor indeed any thing like it."

"This is indeed both strange and unpleasant," thought Miss Moubray. Then added, audibly,

“Are you quite certain, my dear Mrs. Wilson, that you stepped on a trap door?”

“What else should it be? Mason, to be sure, talked of a loose board; but I’m not a fool; and if the board was loose at one time it would have been at another.”

“Where did this happen?”

“In the room we call the yellow one.”

“And the ghost was heard that night?”

“No, he had already ceased his visitations; which it seems are never heard for more than three nights together at a time.”

“Then we may expect peace now?”

“I suppose so, until he thinks proper to come back.”

“And in the meantime that floor must be thoroughly inspected and repaired. It is not pleasant to run the risk of breaking one’s leg by walking upon loose planks, or invisible trap doors. Can you recollect the name of the builder at S—— whom Mr. Wickham recommended?”

“Jones was the name; but I believe Mr.

Wickham would scarcely advise you to call him in on this occasion."

"Why?"

"Because he thinks the less noise we make about it the better. We had a long conversation together on the subject, and he agrees with me in tracing it to the contrivance of some of the servants, and other ill-disposed persons, who want to have the house uninhabited. If that be the case, silence is, of course, our best policy; for when they find they are not likely to succeed, they will give up annoying us."

"Would it not be better to put an end to the inconvenience at once?"

"Certainly, if it could be done. But in such an old rambling house as this, Mr. Wickham and I both think it would be impossible; and in the meantime the other servants might become panic-struck; besides, it's ten to one if workmen, servants, and even constables, would not all be in league; the lower orders always hang together; and then, of course, nothing

would be discovered, and we should be only laughed at for our pains."

" Mason was present, I believe you said, when your foot tripped ?"

" Yes, she prevented my falling."

" Do you think it possible she can know anything about it ?"

" Whether she does or not, she is a person of whom I have a very poor opinion ; her extravagance is really shameful, and I confess I should not be sorry to hear you had discharged her."

" I do not believe she intends remaining much longer ; and for reasons, some of which you know, I would rather avoid a fracas ; still, could I believe her implicated in this matter, there could be no hesitation on the point. I will send for her at once, and question her closely."

Accordingly, Mrs. Wilson withdrew. Mrs. Mason was summoned, and submitted to a course of interrogations ; but the wary waiting-woman was careful not to commit herself ; she was aware, too, that at present the plan must be

to lull, not heighten, any alarm or suspicion Miss Moubray might entertain. She therefore highly applauded the idea of calling in the police, in case of further disturbances, and strongly recommended a thorough inspection of the yellow room, at the same time assuring her mistress that Mrs. Wilson's fears had greatly magnified her fall, which she declared was nothing in reality but a stumble, occasioned, probably, by a "ruck" in the carpet. As for Miss Styleigh's terror, it was perfectly absurd, since, sleeping as she did close to the room occupied by that young lady, if there had been any noise she must have heard it. The rats certainly did make a good deal of uproar, scampering about, as they always do, in old houses ; and the wind whistled through the passages and roared down the chimneys on very stormy nights, all of which might have terrified a person not accustomed to sleep alone ; besides, Miss Styleigh had perhaps found it dull, with nobody but Mrs.

Wilson to speak to, and was glad of an excuse to get away.

The intimation given by the maidens was (she said) most likely owing to some quarrel among themselves, and their impatience of Mrs. Wilson's constant interference, "which, ma'am," concluded Mason, "is a thing no servants will submit to. Everybody has their proper place, and a lady's is in the drawing-room, and there she should remain, instead of going about poking her nose into every hole and corner, and giving *horders* and *counter-horders*, until at last it's not possible to say whether one's standing on one's head or one's heels."

" You may go, Mason," said Cecil; " and if anything more is said or thought about these noises, be so good as to assure the servants that, for my satisfaction as well as theirs, I shall have the matter thoroughly sifted by a police officer from London. Let it be understood, also, that if there be any one in the slightest

measure dissatisfied with any of the arrangements of my household, I wish that either he or she should leave my service immediately."

Mason assured her mistress that, excepting as regarded Mrs. Wilson, no complaints were made, and left the room.

As far as she was personally concerned, the wily creature succeeded in allaying Miss Moubray's suspicions; and, satisfied of her housekeeper's integrity, Cecil's mind was set at rest. She saw little prospect of another visit from her troublesome ancestor; perhaps, indeed, she thought the alarm had been purely imaginary; for in all, excepting very weak minds, there is so strong a bias towards incredulity, that what we have not ourselves seen, heard, or felt, we are exceedingly unwilling to believe.

"What are we to do now?" said Mrs. Mason, entering the snugger (where her trusty colleague Wilcox and she were wont to regale themselves upon dainties which seldom found their way into the upper apartments)—"What

are we to do now, I say ? She's as sharp as a needle, and smokes. I told you the ghost would never do ; and now she talks of bringing down the London police upon us."

" We must have patience, girl. ' Slow and sure' is my motto ; I never knew it fail yet. Come, broil me that turkey's leg ; this wine is good for nothing without a relish : not too much pepper, though, it don't agree with me. And while I think on't, Mrs. Wilcox, you must get a better cook, or else look more after things yourself. The stewed carp at supper wasn't fit to eat ; and as for the ven'son on Tuesday, faugh !—the very thought of it makes me sick. So, d'ye hear, you must keep a better look-out in future, for I expect my *vittals* to be properly dressed. I can't eat raw ven'son."

" And how could I help it's being raw ? It was no fault of mine, I can assure you ; ask Matt Tinely why he left the trap-door unfastened, like a stupid loon as he is ! Old Wilson put her great hoof on it, as you know ; and I was

obliged to stay listening to her all the time the ven'son was a dressing. Fine work I had, too, to lug her up; she was no feather, I can tell you."

"It's a great pity you ever pulled her up at all," observed Nancy Mason, who, in virtue of her relationship to the housekeeper, enjoyed the entrée into that room.

"Why so, Miss Malapert?"

"Because, if you hadn't, she would have broke her leg, and then there'd have been an end of her hounding us about from morning till night. She might have stayed there till Christmas for me!"

"Well done, young'un!" said Wilcox. "You're a true chip of the old block! Here, take a glass of wine, and drink another tumble to old Busybody; and some of this to tickle your throat, and make it slip down easy!"

"Thank ye, Mr. Wilcox," replied the damsel, "thank ye kindly; but I always takes holives with my wine."

“ And so do I,” observed her aunt ; “ I think 'tis more genteel and lady-like than them there grills.”

“ But after all,” said Nancy Mason, as she sipped her mulled claret, “ I don’t see what’s the use of frightening Miss Moubray away from Eldersleigh. I don’t *purtend* to deny that it’s very pleasant to travel sometimes, and I found it very agreeable ; the gentlemen were so polite and pleasant at Westfield ; and the housekeeper had everything very genteel and proper, and treated me with great respect. But for all that, like the lady in the song, I say ‘ there’s no place like home ! ’ ”

“ That’s because you’re a *hignorant* girl, and know nothing of such matters,” replied her aunt.

“ Well, but why should you do it? Isn’t Miss Moubray a kind mistress, and isn’t this a comfortable place where we might be as happy as the day is long, if it wasn’t for Wilson? ”

“ Ah, Nancy, there’s the rub. You have it

now ; Eldersleigh is a snug comfortable place,—at least it would be, if that old she-dragon was out of the way.”

“ And that’s what we’re driving at, d’ye see,” said Wilcox, “ and shall manage it, too, I’ve no doubt, in good time. But take you care, Miss Nancy, and don’t be blabbing, nor asking foolish questions neither.”

“ But,” persisted Miss Nancy, “ I don’t see what good it will be, even if Miss Moubrey is scared away from Eldersleigh ; Wilson would live with her, wherever she was.”

“ But *I* should not,” pompously replied Mason, or, to speak strictly, the female Wilcox, “ nor Wilcox neither, I believe.”

“ And where would you go ? ”

“ Nowhere ; we should stay on here, in charge of the place ; and make a pretty penny too.”

“ And suppose Miss Moubrey should take it into her head to marry Mr. Wickham, as ‘tis said she’s like to do ? ”

“ I’ve been thinking of that too,” drowsily remarked Wilcox.

“ It would be no harm if she did ; a married woman’s secret is worth more than a single one’s. I take it she wouldn’t like Wickham to know of her *hattachment* to my lord ; and see if I don’t make her pay for my discretion.”

“ But, perhaps,” retorted her husband, “ you wouldn’t find that so easy, Mary ; they say he’s a knowing hand, and may be he’d look a little too sharp after the shiners.”

“ Not much fear of that. With Miss Moubray’s fortin and his, ’twill be strange if there isn’t a good round sum settled for pinmoney ; that’ll serve my turn.”

“ Miss Moubray has a good fortin, but I doubt whether he’s a rich man.”

“ Wickham not rich ! Bless you, Wilcox, depend upon it he’s as rich as *Grotius*.” (Crœsus she meant.)

“ What makes you think so, Mary ? ”

“ Why, because he’s so mean and stingy, looking after every farthing, as I’m given to understand ; and gives scarcely anything away.”

“ Those are queer reasons for thinking a man’s rich.”

“ They are true one’s, though ; and if you’ll take the trouble of noticing, you’ll see that it’s always the richest people as gives the least, and does the meanest things.”

“ I believe you’re right : the more money people has the more they want.”

“ Well,” said Nancy, “ I must say that, for all you’ve been observing, I don’t half like this plan of frightening mistress ; she’s always been kind and civil to me ; and though I hate Wilson like poison, I’ve a great respect for Miss Moubray ; and wouldn’t on no account whatsoever harm should come to her ; and I’ve been told that ‘tis a very *serous* thing to be frightened by a *happarition*. Bell White was a saying to me this very afternoon that her sister saw one once, and she

was so scared that she went off into *haystacks*, and couldn't be brought round for ever so long."

" *Haystacks*," quoth Wilcox ; " *haystacks* ; what sort of a complaint's that ?

" She means *isterics*," rejoined his lady, with a look of profound disdain.

" Oh, that's it ?" said Wilcox. " Well, don't be fainthearted, chicken ; Miss Moubray won't be hurt. So go to bed now, and dream of you know who. I tell you what, missus," he continued, as Nancy closed the door, " that niece of yours will blab, if you don't keep a sharp eye upon her."

" Not she, Wilcox ; Nancy knows better than that, I warrant."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning came Mrs. Styleigh to pay a visit of polite civility, and proffer an invitation to dinner for the following Thursday. The Rectory was so connected in Miss Moubray's mind with her mother's image and her father's memory, that she never entered it without pain; and imagining a party there little likely to interest Elizabeth, would have declined the attention, but Miss Hartfield seemed inclined to go, and Mrs. Wilson had almost pledged them. At half-past five, therefore, on the appointed day, the elder lady, in a salmon-coloured satin gown,

tastefully relieved by a blue turban; and the younger ones more simply, and (it is to be hoped) more becomingly, attired, entered the Rectory drawing-room, where they found assembled as numerous a collection of the neighbouring squirearchy as could be accommodated in the moderately-sized rooms.

The dinner proved exceedingly gay. Poor Mrs. Styleigh, it is true, in the excess of her nervousness, on perceiving that the fish was cold and the pastry tough, rubbed her plum-coloured velvet until one section of it looked like the pavement of a street in frosty weather, where boys have been recreating themselves by making slides. It is equally true, the doctor pressed his hospitality upon his guests in the same tone with which he was wont to read the decalogue, or lecture the Sunday-school children;—that Francis Munday, with a Miss Styleigh on each side, seemed ready to expire at their loquacity; and Cecil, placed between Mr. Frampton, a pert conceited dandy of the third degree, who was

particularly obnoxious to her; and Sir William Baker, a man of sixty, deaf, and wearing a brown scratch wig, found herself speculating more than once on the nature of an animated and apparently highly-interesting conversation which was carrying on at the other end of the table between Elizabeth and Mr. Wickham. In spite of all this, however, the party was a gay one; all the other guests ate, drank, talked, laughed, and enjoyed themselves, to the utmost of their power.

When the ladies retired to the drawing-room, they found there Mrs. Munday, who had not been considered of sufficient importance to be included in the dinner invitation. She was a great invalid, and never left her own fireside without reluctance; but on the present occasion, fearful of offending her son's superior, had made an effort and overcome her usual disinclination to mix in society. Cecil was delighted to see her, for she was one of the few persons in that neighbourhood in whom she felt really inter-

ested, and immediately seating herself by her, commenced a rational conversation ; while Miss Styleigh executed a rondo of Dussek's, and her younger sister enumerated to Elizabeth all the gaieties, periodical or impromptu, to which —shire was liable.

Mrs. Munday was less cheerful than usual ; she had learnt that morning the fate of a little work, the profits of which had been destined to add a few comforts to her very *modeste ménage*. It had been rejected from want of patronage ; and she was too poor to incur the risk of publishing at her own expense.

“ But, perhaps,” she observed, after mentioning her disappointment, “ I ought rather to rejoice at the failure of my application to Messrs. —. I am thus saved the mortification of seeing my little work puffed in the newspapers previous to its appearance, and the annoying criticisms of the reviewers subsequently.”

“ Dear Mrs. Munday,” replied Cecil, “ you

would surely have encountered neither. In this case puffing was quite unnecessary ; and for the reviewers, to say nothing of other considerations,—would not your sex have been a shield ?”

“ I fear not. I have sometimes thought them more severe on female, than on male writers.”

“ If your observation be correct, it says little for their generosity,” observed her son.

“ Probably they would tell you, as poor Mrs. Hemans once remarked, when her feelings had been wounded by a severe critique on a tragedy of hers, that those persons (I forget her precise words) who have not nerve enough to bear criticism, should not step out of their way to court it.”

“ Supposing the reviewers do act on such premises,” said Cecil, “ the notion could only apply to those females who invade the higher paths of literature,—political economists, historians, astronomers. So long as a woman confines herself to such works as yours, can she be

said to step out of her allotted path? While her endeavours rest in attempting to provide a solace for the sick chamber; to afford amusement for man's idle hours, or to place lessons of morality and religion in the way of those who, in another guise, might perhaps reject the unpalatable truth; does she not still fulfil her destiny? Is she not the nurse, instructress, plaything, and therefore still the woman — the weak and sensitive woman, and as such, may she not challenge forbearance? Oh, I cannot believe that any man, any one who has the feelings of a man at least, could be severe under such circumstances."

"There is another reason why female writers of this class should not be discouraged," said Mr. Graham (a pale elderly man, with a highly intellectual cast of countenance); "I allude to the fact of the majority of novel readers being young women, from whose perusal we naturally withhold anything that might injure the mo-

desty and purity of mind which form such beautiful attributes in the female character. Now, unfortunately, although the works of male authors are more vigorous in idea, more replete with wit, and perhaps excite a deeper interest, than those of women, yet are there, in many, scenes and expressions which are not desirable for a woman's eye. The notions of religion, too, and sentiments of morality, are low; the heroines are frequently described as meeting their lovers half way at least; and although this sort of thing makes very pretty love scenes, and reads well, we should be sorry to see our daughters enacting the same in *propria personæ*. Of course, I am speaking generally. Scott's novels were free from blemish of this kind, although to me his quotations from Scripture appear highly reprehensible. The author of '*Tremaine*,' also, has furnished works which might pass the most fastidious ordeal; and there are, I doubt not, others equally correct. Still, there are many

highly-talented writings open to censure on the heads I have enumerated ; and as the works of women, though more insipid, are less liable to these objections, they should not, I think, meet with unnecessary discouragement."

"At any rate, critics should bear in mind how few channels of independence are open to a woman ; and that, perhaps, by exercising an over-fastidious judgment, they are depriving her of her very means of subsistence," observed Mr. Wickham, with a degree of thoughtlessness quite foreign to his nature, and which caused a temporary suffusion over Mrs. Munday's pallid countenance ; but hers was not a nature to harbour resentment. She felt he had spoken inadvertently, and, after a moment's hesitation, replied, in her usual calm manner—

"True, very true; some female writers, indeed, may be led by that will-o'-the-wisp,—desire of fame ; but in nine cases out of ten, I believe necessity to have been the cause of their adopt-

ing a profession so much at variance with a woman's feelings, both from the publicity it entails, and the prejudice it calls forth."

"Why should that prejudice exist?" inquired Cecil.

"La, Miss Moubray, don't you know? It is because the men are jealous of us," said Mrs. Brownrigg, a newly-married lady, rather pretty, who cherished budding notions of blueism.

"They can hardly be jealous," replied Cecil, "when in point of intellect we are so decidedly inferior."

"Is that inferiority very decided?" asked Munday.

"I should imagine beyond doubt."

"Some people would disagree with you, and quote the names of Dacier, De Stael, Carter, and Somerville, to prove the extent of a woman's powers, even in the more erudite branches of learning; and I need not remind you of the trite remark respecting female sovereigns."

“ Which, after all, awards but a reflected honour upon my sex; *we* govern well, because you govern us. And for the names you have mentioned, they can but be considered as exceptions—bright ones, it is true, but still only exceptions, to the general rule.”

“ Our education is against us,” remarked Mrs. Munday; “ but even were it otherwise, were girls judiciously brought up—were their energies less frittered away—their time more usefully employed—their faculties more widely developed, it would still, I think, be seen, that with the weaker frame we have a feebler intellect. Our strength lies in our affections, and we reign by the heart and through the heart. Had I a daughter, the idea of mental equality would be the last lesson she should learn from me; I cannot, therefore, agree with Mrs. Brownrigg, in tracing the prejudice we are speaking of to jealousy.”

“ Then what is it,” asked Mrs. Brownrigg,

that makes people cry out so much against us?"

"Perhaps you wear your petticoats too short?" replied Mr. Graham.

"Oh no, I assure you, short petticoats are all the fashion," she answered, looking at her feet.

"I spoke figuratively; I meant to say that women who seek to wield a weapon generally considered as belonging solely to the other sex, are often tempted to forget the extreme circumspection custom requires from them. As English ladies are said to walk ungracefully from the habit of constantly taking a brother's, father's, or husband's arm, so it often happens that a woman whose talent approximates her to the stronger sex loses the diffidence of manner and retiring habits of her own. Her turn of mind renders her impatient of the many trivial restraints society imposes upon her sex; she becomes *unwomanly*,—she is *singular*, (and singularity in a woman is always a mistake, if not a fault,) sometimes even eccentric; for what are

genius, eccentricity, madness, but so many links in the chain of human suffering?"

"Do you then consider genius an evil?" inquired Munday.

"In its consequences it certainly is; for if successful, you are envied, and, of course, disliked; if you fail, blame and contempt are poured upon you. Talent is undoubtedly a gift, but seldom, very seldom, does it prove a blessing."

"Some persons," observed Cecil, "object to works of fiction altogether."

"I cannot agree with them," replied Mrs. Munday. "An excess of light reading must, of course, prove injurious; but the human mind needs relaxation; the bow that is always bent may break; the stream too closely dammed will overflow its banks. Works of fiction, therefore, are admissible; indeed, as Hannah More remarks, 'Many such productions may be read with safety, some even with profit.'"

"Hannah More!" cried Captain Brownrigg;

“oh yes, she wrote *Cœlebs*; too old fashioned to please me; do you like it?”

“Certainly,” replied Mrs. Munday; “*Cœlebs* appears to me a work containing talent, good sense, and piety; and the very favourable reception it met with proves that I am not, at any rate, singular in my opinion.”

“I have often been surprised,” said Mr. Graham, “at the eagerness with which *Cœlebs* was read by all classes; even by those who must, I should think, have recognised their own portraits in some of the characters, and not have felt particularly pleased with the bold and fearless manner in which the writer reprobates their vices and exposes their frivolity.”

“Perhaps,” said Miss Moubray, “the persons you allude to read *Cœlebs* and thought of their neighbours?”

“Very probably; we are all more ready to point the moral of a tale at others rather than ourselves.”

“ What a number of clever writers there are now,” said Mrs. Brownrigg.

“ Of well-educated people, certainly, the number is considerable; but there is a wide difference between knowledge and talent,” replied Mr. Graham.

“ Ours may, indeed, be called the educational era,” remarked Mrs. Munday.

“ We are, I fear, becoming too learned,” said Mr. Graham.

“ But,” inquired Cecil, “ is not education a helpmate to genius? Surely the mental powers, in some respects, resemble the soil, and may be improved by cultivation.”

“ To a certain extent; but beyond that, learning becomes a hindrance; just as, though some degree of clothing is necessary, even ornamental, a redundancy of drapery serves but to cumber the limbs and destroy their free action.”

“ Still, you must allow there are many men of genius even among novel writers.”

“ I have no wish to detract from their merits ; on the contrary, there are some I could mention whose commanding talents I should like to see taking a higher range.”

“ In which case you would quarrel perhaps less with their education ?”

“ Certainly. To the historian, the philosopher, or the antiquarian, my remark hardly applied ; it was made with reference to writers of the imagination ; those, in fact, of whom we had been previously discoursing.”

“ But why even to them ? Is it not an advantage that a novel should be well written, and, if possible, the means of conveying instruction ?”

“ Of course ; but it is not also an advantage that a work professedly belonging to the class called “ light,” should be full of metaphysical disquisitions, often neither comprehensible, nor to the point. Formerly, writers contented themselves with simply describing scenes, or narrating events ; and if a remark was some-

times introduced, it was short, apposite, and, above all, easily understood. Now-a-days, the lady cannot smile, blush, or find occasion for her pocket handkerchief, nor the hero frown or sigh, without a wearisome digression, in order that the exact cause of such blushes, tears, smiles, and frowns may be thoroughly investigated; which digressions the reader must skip, or lose his interest in the narrative. For I need hardly remark how impossible it is to enter into a speculative discussion, and at the same time maintain our sympathy in fictitious suffering or happiness. Now, in all probability, this tedium would have been spared the reader, had the author, or rather, I should say, authoress (for the fault is most prominent in female writers), been less highly educated. Nothing of this kind can be observed in the writers of former times; and that they were superior to those of our day is proved by the fact, that the highest praise the latter ever elicit is a comparison with the Austens, Burneys,

Lees, et cetera. I do not mean to say, there is not quite as much talent now as formerly; but between their anxiety to dispose of their overstock of knowledge, and the rapidity with which they write, authors do not really give themselves fair play."

" May not the astonishing expedition with which books are brought out be the cause of the other faults you have alluded to? When we are pressed for time, it is, you know, sometimes easier to draw from old stores than new ones."

" Very possibly; they find the imagination at fault, and tax their memories to supply the deficiency."

" Now," said Mrs. Munday, "since you have acknowledged the *existence* of equal talent, pray carry your eulogy a little further, and agree with me in saying, that we have latterly been favoured with some writings totally exempt from the drawbacks you describe."

" Have I not already said that we have

some novelists who are even superior to their craft?"

"True," she replied, "but those, I am sure, were men. I want a little praise for my own sex."

"Which I willingly bestow; for, of course, I spoke generally, of authors *en masse*. My criticism was wholesale, as was my reading formerly, when connected with the —— Review."

"Dear me," cried Mrs. Brownrigg, "are you a Reviewer?"

"I was one; but don't look so terrified. We are, I can assure you, very harmless animals in a general way, and never bite, but in our censorial capacity."

"Oh, yes," she replied, in rather a mysterious tone, "I am no stranger to your proceedings; I know very well what you are."

"Do you speak experimentally, Mrs. Brownrigg?"

"Why no, I cannot exactly say I do; but a very particular friend of mine, Lucy Lam-

pehouse, published some poems,—very sweet things indeed they were, called *Moonlight Musings*, and you can have no idea how they were cut up in the — Review. I hope you did not write the article, Mr. Graham?" (Mr. Graham disclaimed.) " Well, every body laughed so, and made such a joke of it, that Mr. Lampehouse declared he would disinherit his daughter if she ever did anything of the kind again;—so she is married instead."

" And I dare say has great reason to thank the Reviewer," said Captain Brownrigg.

" La, Charles, how droll you are," she said, tapping him with her fan.

A momentary silence succeeded, which was broken by the same lady, some of whose marriage portion had been employed in purchasing a small property in that neighbourhood.

" Mr. Munday, what a terrible set of people you are down here; I mean the lower orders, of course. The aristocracy (with a gentle elevation of the head) is everywhere the same. I

called this morning on one of our principal tenants—you know in these times it is so very desirable a good understanding should exist between landlord and tenant—and I assure you I was perfectly amazed at the account she gave of the people about."

"I am afraid much cannot be said in their favour," replied Munday.

"Shocking, indeed!" pursued Mrs. Brownrigg. She described them as idle, dissolute——(thank you, I never use a footstool,) and every thing that's dreadful. I really had no idea such creatures were to be met with out of London."

"Wherever you find temptation, there will be vice. The state of idleness to which an excess of population condemns two-thirds of our labourers, must produce the usual fruits of want of occupation."

"They would do better to emigrate, my good Sir," said Captain Brownrigg.

"So we have endeavoured to persuade them ; but they cling, not unnaturally, to the land and

soil that gave them birth. And although a peculiarly advantageous opportunity arose for this purpose, with a very few exceptions, none were willing to embrace it."

"By George!" replied the Captain, "they should be made to go, whether they like it or not."

"You are a friend to emigration, I perceive," said Cecil.

"I am, undoubtedly. To say the truth, I have always looked upon the common people as a nuisance."

"Which you would gladly see removed."

"Ha, ha, ha; very well turned indeed, Miss Moubrey. Allow me to compliment you on the readiness of your wit."

"Pray do not; I dislike puns so cordially, that I feel almost ashamed of having perpetrated one."

"I suppose, Miss Moubrey, you do not carry your objection as far as our immortal Dr. John-

son? He said, you know, that, in his opinion, the man who could make a pun would also pick a pocket," remarked Mrs. Brownrigg, looking as if she had said something new.

"No," replied Cecil, smiling, "I do not carry my objection quite so far."

"I suppose," rejoined the bride, addressing Mrs. Munday, "you are a great admirer of wit?"

"Very great indeed, when it is harmless."

"Is wit ever harmless?" inquired her son.

"I see no reason, Francis, why it should not be."

"Can that which is *pointed* fail to wound?"

"Not bad that, upon my life!" said Captain Brownrigg.

"But I must ask Miss Moubrey's pardon, for it is almost a pun."

"Not in the least," answered Mrs. Brownrigg; "it is merely a jeu d'esprit, very much

in the style of something I really must repeat, for I am sure it will enchant you. Shortly before I was married, I was sitting with mamma in the drawing-room, when Sir Leslie Plummer was announced. You are acquainted with Sir Leslie, Miss Moubray, I presume? No! Well, you astonish me; I should have thought that at Lord St. Maur's you would certainly have met; but he is very fastidious, and cares for nothing but the society of really talented people. However, you shall become acquainted with him; he has promised me a visit in the course of the summer, and I will make a point of introducing you. A most delightful creature,—one of my very few favourites."

"My dear Sarah, you forget the *jeu d'esprit* all this time."

"If you are so impatient, Charles, I shall really think you're jealous."

"Pshaw!" replied her husband.

"Yes, yes! you certainly are!" she cried, exultingly. "Isn't he, Mrs. Munday? That

must not be, Charles; I shan't allow it,—I shan't, indeed. Sir Leslie is quite a privileged person, and the most witty man in the world."

" Of which you promised us a specimen," said Munday, who thought that, as they must undergo Sir Leslie's witticism, the sooner it was over the better.

" It was this," replied Mrs. Brownrigg. " He came in, as I told you, to pay a friendly morning visit; and after talking over the literary novelties of the day, I petitioned for something for my album. It wasn't fair, I know ; however, I did make the request; and after a little hesitation, he gave me an entirely new riddle, of which O'Connell was the subject,—that dear, delightful, patriotic creature. I suppose you partake of my enthusiasm for him, Miss Moubray ? Well, the riddle was — Why is Mr. O'Connell like the letter T ? I'm confident you'll never be able to guess."

" Why—is—Mr. O'Connell—like—the—letter — T ?" said Lydia Styleigh, slowly.

“ Why is Mr. O’Connell like the letter T? I am sure I cannot tell.”

“ Because he’s terrible ! ” cried her younger sister.

“ Oh dear, no ! You are not right.”

“ Because without him there would be no agitation,” said Cecil.

“ No, that is not it.”

A few more guesses equally to the purpose were made; and then Mrs. Brownrigg, full of delighted importance, exclaimed—

“ I told you you would never find it out.”

“ I am afraid it is beyond us,” observed Mrs. Munday.

“ Well, then, I suppose I must tell you. You know how Mr. O’Connell plagues the ministers, and is always harping on the wrongs of Ireland, and the rights of Ireland; so that people are tired to death of hearing of nothing but Ireland, Ireland, Ireland; and he’s like the letter T, because he makes Ireland *Tireland*.”

Everybody laughed at the solution of the rid-

dle, for bad jokes are sometimes more amusing than good ones; and Mrs. Brownrigg thought herself the most agreeable person in the room.

“Miss Moubrey,” said Mrs. Styleigh, “wont you favour us with some music? I’ve been endeavouring to persuade Miss Hartfield, but she complains of cold.”

As Cecil, in compliance with this request, walked to the piano, she observed that Elizabeth (who, by the way, had nothing like a cold,) was sitting at a table apart from the rest of the company, turning over the leaves of a Souvenir, at the same time talking gaily with Edward Wickham, who had placed himself by her side almost immediately after making the ungracious remark that had so much pained Mrs. Munday. Miss Moubrey’s musical performances were short; she was speedily succeeded by the Misses Styleigh, who dashed off with the *Nightingale* duet.

“Harriet,” whispered the eldest, “I wish you wouldn’t poke out your elbow so far; I can’t move my arm a bit.” (Harriet’s elbow retreated

half an inch.) “There, now, you’ve gone and put the pedal down on my corn ! And don’t thump so ; you play those runs so loud nobody can hear my shake.”

“Goodness, Lydia,” replied her sister, “how can you say so ! I’m sure you’re thumping finely yourself ; you might be heard at York.” Cecil thought it not unlikely ; and was much relieved when some crashing chords announced the finale.

Miss Styleigh then sang “Sweet home,” and threatened “Cherry ripe ;” but the ears of the auditors were spared that infliction by Wickham leading Elizabeth to the piano.

“I thought you were not equal to singing,” said Cecil, with some surprise.

“Indeed, I believe it is not prudent ; but Mr. Wickham would take no denial.” And, placing herself at the instrument, Miss Hartfield sang a Venetian canzonet, with taste and judgment ; while Wickham listened with a degree of atten-

tion which even Cecil's musical powers had failed of eliciting.

Shortly after, the carriages were announced, and they returned home; Mrs. Wilson in high spirits, for she had spent an evening entirely to her heart's content; and Elizabeth indulging in certain agreeable reveries, to which Mr. Wickham's apparent admiration had given rise, and in which most other young ladies would equally have indulged, if, like Miss Hartfield, they had been advertized unsuccessfully for the last four years.

Cecil's tone of mind was far less complacent than that of either of her companions; for the source of Elizabeth's satisfaction affected her very differently. Everybody is aware of the great power of jealousy; how many wavering lovers have been fixed by the appearance of a rival; the number of silly girls, who, actuated by the same paltry feeling, have flirted until they became hopelessly entangled; that even in-

difference, we know, has sometimes been changed to love by its magic spell.

Cecil was certainly very far from being in love with Mr. Wickham ; nor could the pique caused by the transfer of his attentions to Miss Hartfield be properly termed jealousy ; yet is it very certain, his caprice gave umbrage to our heroine. Had he brought home a wife from London, Cheltenham, Bath, or any other marriage-market, Cecil would not perhaps have quarrelled with his choice ; but to be a witness of his inconstancy—to have it all take place before her—to be forsaken for Elizabeth, in every way her inferior,—it was impossible to resist a slight feeling of vexation ; and yet, by a strange contradiction of feelings, never before had she been so interested in him.

In talking over the dinner party, and, in truth, the Styleighs could speak of little else for the ensuing week, many were the surmises to which the apparent estrangement between Mr. Wickham and Miss Moubrey gave birth. Lydia was

certain “an engagement had taken place; it was a rule” (she knew) “that engaged people never spoke to each other in public.” Her sister, on the contrary, “was satisfied there had been a quarrel.” Mrs. Styleigh feared “he was jilting Miss Moubrey;” and considered his inconstancy doubly reprehensible, inasmuch as its object was a stranger: had he forsaken Miss Moubrey for “None of her girls, the misdemeanor would have been lighter. But, as the Doctor truly observed, “None of these suggestions accounted for the want of courtesy with which Mrs. Munday had been treated; he was therefore of opinion, that the Mundays were in reality the cause of this unusual behaviour. Mr. Wickham had been disgusted with their forwardness, and wished to testify his disapprobation of the intimacy his future lady seemed anxious to cultivate.”

The Doctor came nearest the mark; the inoffensive Mundays had occasioned Wickham’s want of self-command; not, however, on the grounds asserted, but his jealous fears had been

awakened by the cordiality that had characterized Miss Moubray's meeting with the young clergyman, and the marked attention she had paid his mother during the after part of the evening. Francis was good looking, gentleman-like, and agreeable; and although it was not likely the high-born Cecil would bestow herself upon a poor curate, (especially as she was young, and women do not usually make fools of themselves for love until they have passed the half-way house of human life,) the thing was possible; and with all the weakness of a man in love, Wickham gave into the improbable idea.

On the following day, however, Mr. Graham, who was staying at Langton, expressed a wish to see Eldersleigh, and become further acquainted with its beautiful mistress. They rode over accordingly; and as during the visit Cecil treated Wickham with her usual friendliness; and bestowed quite as many smiles upon the elderly Graham as she had on the previous evening

lavished on Munday, he speedily returned to his allegiance; and Elizabeth as quickly recognised her error. Then, finding that he was the only good speculation in that part of the world, and that the very secluded life she was likely to lead at Eldersleigh was wholly unfitted to her taste, Miss Hartfield contrived to get herself recalled at the end of ten days.

The visit had been productive of disappointment to both ladies. Miss Hartfield fancied the home of a rich and beautiful young woman must necessarily prove gay and attractive, the very reverse, in fact, of Eldersleigh; while our heroine, who for the last two years had seen nothing of Elizabeth, hoped she should find her, at least, a rational companion, capable of entering into her pursuits, and whose conversation would be a relief from Mrs. Wilson's interminable domestic harangues, or exhaustless store of tiresome gossip. But beyond the chit-chat of the day Miss Hartfield's conversational

powers seldom went; she had not sufficient philanthropy of character to take an interest in the poor, who did not immediately belong to her; and music, drawing, languages, all those accomplishments given to women (it is said) by way of resources, had entirely lost their zest; and she astonished Cecil by the shallowness of her understanding, and restless craving for frivolous excitement. Yet Elizabeth was not naturally devoid of sense or feeling; but the period of time that had elapsed since she and Cecil were last together had been differently spent by them, and a corresponding difference in their respective characters was distinctly visible.

Miss Moubrey's mind and disposition had been, perhaps, unnaturally forced on; Elizabeth's, on the contrary, had remained stationary, or rather, I should say, had retrograded; for the human mind never remains the same.

For while Miss Moubrey's time had been divided between her trying attendance upon her

uncle, or the elegant and sometimes highly intellectual society at Selwood, or the anxious duties of her present position,—Elizabeth's had been swallowed up by frivolous engagements or occupations, and all her mental energies weakened and destroyed in the pursuit of exciting and injurious amusement.

CHAPTER IX.

BUT, however uncongenial as a companion, Miss Hartfield's abrupt departure left an unpleasing impression on our heroine's mind, since it seemed to dissipate one of the illusions with which she had invested her future existence. Not altogether unnaturally, Cecil had formed her opinion of a country life from that led at Selwood ; and though fully alive to the wide difference between Lord St. Maur and herself, and not for an instant comparing his home with hers, she had yet hoped that, as the beautiful, the wealthy, the talented, the great, had in

their turn been willing inmates of his stately mansion, so might she surround herself with chosen and valued friends ; but how futile the idea, since even Elizabeth would not remain !

And as the winter, fast closing in, threw an air of still greater desolation on all around, and she thought of the gloomy days and interminable evenings which lay before her, it is not easy to describe the chilling sense of dreariness which took possession of her mind ; all her energies seemed paralyzed, the slightest exertion became painful, and her usual pursuits uninteresting even to disgust. Then came an aching wish for change, any change that would remove her to a less cheerless home ; it was not for gaiety her spirit yearned, nor even for an enlarged acquaintance, but for social intercourse : the communion of one kindred soul, the society of one rational companion,—a brother, sister, parent,—had changed the whole complexion of her life.

And soon the insecurity of her position rendered this craving more urgent. Notwithstand-

ing all her anxiety to benefit her tenantry, she was exceedingly unpopular amongst them ; the money so lavishly bestowed had served but to increase their evil habits ; and when, at length, aware of her error, she endeavoured to remedy it by altering the mode of relief, their discontent amounted to indignation. Money they would receive, but clothes and food were beneath their notice ; in fact, they were idle, ragged, and worthless, but not poor. The attempt also to maintain the privacy of her park and gardens had excited excessive discontent, and although no longer persevered in, was not forgotten. As Mr. Hartfield had predicted, also, the determination of preserving the game gave still greater umbrage ; there were constant hostile meetings between the poachers and gamekeepers, and at length an affray of so serious a nature took place, that one of the latter was desperately wounded, while the perpetrators of the violence escaped.

A meeting of the county gentlemen was im-

mediately called, and a reward offered for the apprehension of the principal aggressors, to which Dr. Styleigh most unadvisedly, and entirely on his own authority, added, in Miss Moubray's name, an increase to a considerable amount. Of course this did not serve to increase her popularity; and amongst other proofs of the ill will borne towards her by the lower orders, she received more than one letter from Swing, and Swing was not a desirable correspondent five or six years ago.

In the present state of things it is not easy to call to mind the horror of that period: all is so quiet, so peaceful now, that we can hardly believe that it is but a few, a very few years, since insubordination and malcontent stalked through the land, and the whole country blazed with incendiary fires. To what may we trace this forgetfulness? How is it that persons who are perpetually brooding over anticipated dangers never remember those they have been saved from? That while the splendid but blood-

stained events which marked the Regency of George the Fourth, are still dwelt upon with grateful exultation, the less ostentatious, but far more valuable triumphs of his successor's rule are disregarded ? Is it that we remember only that which gratifies our pride ? that which dazzles our imaginations ? Or is it not rather that, disliking the channel through which the blessings flowed, we seek to undervalue them ? And should the latter be the case, how much is there to be regretted ? That party men should give way to such feelings is not surprising, for there is no degree of baseness to which party spirit will not stoop,—no means, no instrument, however degraded, however vile, that it will hesitate to use ; but that well-designing, even religious persons, should follow in the same track does appear strange. There are some in our day who talk, and loudly too, of national sins. Is, I would ask them, discontent no sin ? Is there merit in ingratitude ? Do we well to underrate the blessings of order and subordination, simply

because the men through whose instrumentality these benefits have been conferred belong not to the side in politics we have espoused ? Is it right to be perpetually predicting evil ? Ought we not rather to reflect, that by occasioning mistrust we sap the basis of commercial credit, and thus accelerate the crisis we profess ourselves so ready to avert.

The communications Miss Moubrey received were diverse in complexion ; some were scarcely legible ; others again fairly written and well worded ; but all agreed in import. “ The prosecution must be stopped, Mathews discharged, his predecessor reinstated in his former office, and money liberally distributed among the poor peasantry.” In case of refusal, the usual threats were held out. Cecil was naturally much terrified, and her perplexity was increased by the circumstance that both Mr. Wickham and Lord Ashford were absent,—the first on business, the latter with his family in the south of Devon, where they were in the habit of spending the

winter on account of Lady Ashford's health. Nor did the contrariety of the counsel tendered to her serve to lessen her embarrassment. Mr. Moubray advised every concession, assuring her that she must carefully avoid further exasperating the tempers of the people; and when Mrs. Wilson suggested that such a course would probably lead to fresh demands and annoyances, he recommended his cousin to withdraw herself from Eldersleigh until the ferment should have subsided, and a better understanding be established between landlord and tenantry. Sir John Middleton and Dr. Styleigh, on the other hand, insisted that a great crisis was approaching, that the slightest evidence of fear on the part of the landed gentry would be attended with the most disastrous consequences, and therefore nothing must be yielded.

Cecil, completely bewildered, chose a middle path. The prosecution was to be suffered gradually to drop to the ground. She retained Mathews, at the same time promoting the former game-

keeper to the charge of a recently-erected lodge, with a handsome stipend in addition to his annuity. Half measures never satisfy. The tenantry felt they had gained an advantage, and, as discontented and even more turbulent than before, continued their predatory habits, until Miss Moubray, harassed and wearied by constant anxieties, would gladly have followed her kinsman's advice by making a temporary absence from home ; but a rheumatic fever confined poor Mrs. Wilson to her bed and room : a removal therefore was for the present out of the question.

Then followed another affray between the gamekeepers and the poachers, in which Giles Burton, son of the ex-gamekeeper, lost his life. A verdict of justifiable homicide was returned ; but Cecil, shocked beyond measure by this fatal catastrophe, relinquished henceforth all desire of preserving the game, and discharged the keepers. Mathews she would gladly have retained in any other capacity, but her offers, although of the

most liberal description, were respectfully declined by him.

“ Of course ma’am,” he said, after thanking her for her wishes; “ of course, ma’am, if it is your intention not to preserve the game, it doesn’t become me to be making any remarks; though to my mind ’tis a thousand pities to give it all up; a few years good looking after, and there wouldn’t be better shooting in all England.”

“ It would be too dearly purchased, though, Mathews. I really couldn’t risk a repetition of these dreadful scenes.”

“ Well, to be sure, ’tis not quite the thing for a lady. But, if I may make so bold, ma’am, I hope you’ll be kind enough to inform his lordship ’tis for no fault of mine I’m parted with.”

“ Oh, no !” cried Cecil, “ you have served me only too well; and I wish it were in my power better to repay your services, or reward your zeal.”

“ Say nothing of that, ma’am; I’ve done nothing but my duty. You’ve been a kind and

gentle mistress to me, and 'twould have been a crying sin and shame if I hadn't done my best to serve you. And if so be, ma'am, the time should ever come when a strong arm or steady eye would be of service, remember Will Mathews will be proud if you would send for him." (Cecil thanked the sturdy yeoman for an offer which she knew to be sincere.) "And if," he continued, "it wouldn't seem too great a liberty for me to be proffering advice, I should say, don't ever stray far from home ; them woods yonder is lone places, and you may meet bad people there."

"Indeed, I am afraid there are some disagreeable characters in this neighbourhood."

"The most *varmint* race I ever set eyes upon. Neither flesh nor fowl, sea nor land ; no telling where to catch them ; poaching one day, smuggling the next, and up to mischief anywhere. And the most disgracefullest part of the whole is, that 'tis only because you're a lady makes them so dreadful bad."

“ Is that really the case, Mathews ?”

“ Yes, ma’am, it is indeed ; why bless your soul, if his lordship was here, they’d no more dare to behave in this manner—he’d soon put them down, I’ll warrant.”

“ I’m afraid they do take advantage of my helplessness.”

“ Yes, ma’am ; and the more’s the shame, say I. And then to think they’re your own natural servants, for you know, ma’am, these are only what used to be called *wassals*, in former times, and as I was a saying to my *missus*, last Sunday afternoon, what a pity ’tis our young lady wasn’t born two or three hundred years agone ; then she might have strung up ever so many of those rascallions, like so many carrion crows, as a warning to the others. For, if what I read the other day is true, (I’m fond of reading when I’ve got an idle hour,) if, as I was saying, it’s all true, in former times gentlefolks like you had power of life and death over their born *wassals*, and very right they should. No radicals then,

nor poachers neither, I'll warrant. No wonder people talk so about the good old times." Mathews continued some time longer in the same strain ; and, after a renewal of his offer, in case his services could be made available, finally took his leave. And as the worthy creature left the room, Cecil felt that another of the links that bound her to the past was broken.

About this time she received a letter from Mrs. Hartfield ; the foregoing part of which, as it related principally to domestic matters, we shall take the liberty of omitting.

" I have delayed writing until now," Mrs. Hartfield said, " because I wished to give some account of the embassy you charged me with, but in vain, for I have not hitherto found an opportunity of speaking with Lord St. Maur ; nor, to say the truth, do I imagine one will arise, since, although I have met him more than once at Lady G —s, and have, on the strength of your uncle's dinner party, availed myself of the

English woman's privilege (is it a privilege?) of bowing first, I have been unable to establish anything like an acquaintance. Indeed, his reserve and coldness almost lead me to think he wishes to avoid my society. Henry, too, who came with us from Paris, declares nothing can exceed the impertinent hauteur with which his lordship has been pleased to meet every attempt on my brother's part to renew their former acquaintance."

"With Lady Mary I have been more fortunate; accompanied by a respectable looking person, whom I immediately recognised to be the trusty Reynolds, she came into Luigi's one morning when I was there; and as, in spite of those dark eyes, she appears the very opposite of her papa, there was no difficulty in engaging her in conversation; and I must say, I have seldom seen a sweeter or more intelligent creature. Both she and Mrs. Reynolds express a favourable opinion of her health; but, judging from the excessive delicacy of her appearance,

she is still in a very precarious state. There is also an expression of precocity of mind and feeling in her countenance quite unnatural in childhood, and therefore either the effect or cause (for in these cases it is difficult to distinguish) of disease, which, were she my child, would fill me with unceasing anxiety. A slight civility, having its origin in a few unexpected drops of rain, has been, I am sorry to say, the means of procuring me the honour of Lady Newrystown's acquaintance ; she desired an introduction, and called to thank me for "my kind attention to her dear little relative." Now, had Lord St. Maur chosen to favour me with a visit on this occasion, it might not perhaps have been extraordinary ; but I really cannot see that she was in any manner called upon to acknowledge my offer (for it went no further than an offer) of taking Lady Mary home in my carriage ; unless, indeed, the *on dit* of the day be true,—namely, that they are privately married. At any rate, his holding back proves,

I think, the correctness of my suspicion ; and therefore, dearest Cecil, I fear I shall not be able to fulfil your wishes.

“ You are curious, I dare say, for my opinion of Lady Newrystown ; I can only say it is more unfavourable than, notwithstanding my prejudice against her, I had imagined possible ; indeed, I can now almost pardon Mason’s officious indiscretion ; for surely the man who can give such a mother to such a child is not worthy of Cecil Moubray’s affection. Very different, however, is the impression produced by her upon the gentlemen. My sober Edward declares “ she is a monstrous fine creature,” and Henry is so engoué, that I am not altogether sorry he leaves us in a few days ; for, although still in mourning for one man, and engaged, if not actually married, to another, she appears quite as willing to accept Henry’s homage as he is to tender it. I am interrupted, and can add no more. Ever, my dearest Cecil,

“ Your most affectionate,

“ CAROLINE HARTFIELD.”

Cecil read this letter twice ; the first time with eager haste,—the second, slowly pausing over each word, as though she would have discovered some hidden meaning ; she then remained some time buried in intense thought, and when her former occupation was resumed, it was with the air of a person who was come to a fixed and painful resolution.

To Mrs. Hartfield.

“ DEAREST CAROLINE,—I hasten to reply to your friendly communication, for I am convinced the general tenour of my letter will give you pleasure. I know that your affection for me, and the high esteem you entertain for Mr. Wickham, will lead you to learn with satisfaction my final determination respecting him. In resolving to unite my fate to his, it were idle to assert that I am influenced by what is called love,—but if esteem, confidence in his affection, and a firm reliance on the excellence of his moral character, can justify my decision, all these are mine ; and I feel satisfied that as Mr.

Wickham's wife I shall enjoy as large a portion of happiness as falls commonly to the lot of mortals. Peace, protection, escape from all the harassing difficulties by which I am surrounded and borne down, I shall, at any rate, secure—. But I write in confidence, perfect confidence, and you must not breathe a word of this to any creature ; nothing is decided ; the proposal has not even yet been made. Under these circumstances, dearest Caroline, you will understand that I am far from feeling disappointed at your failure regarding Lord St. Maur. And even should an opportunity of speaking to him present itself, I must entreat you will not make the slightest allusion to the subject ; it would, I think, be hardly delicate ; and as it is now quite clear he does not, never did, love me, I would not on any account take a step that might lead to a suspicion of the nature of the sentiments I was once weak enough to entertain for him—and which have long since passed away. But should you again

meet Mary, tell her I love her tenderly—that I wear the ring she gave me—that Daisy is well,—yet, no, no—tell her nothing—it is better Mary and I should forget each other.

“Your account of Lady Newrystown saddened me. I cannot bear to think of that sweet child under such tuition; it grieves me that one by nature so warm-hearted and ingenuous, should be nurtured in cold deceit and heartless frivolity; but perhaps we judge her harshly—and for Mary’s sake, even for *his*, I would gladly believe her less unamiable. You have probably heard that Mrs. Lawson’s misconduct has at length occasioned so serious a breach between her and her husband that a legal separation is talked of; she is at present with Lady Emily, who appears greatly distressed by this unhappy business; and so I suppose will be another member of the family. At any rate, his pride will be wounded by the disgrace of so near a relation.

“Farewell, dearest friend. I would write

more, but I am not equal to it; a slight nervous fever hangs about me, and makes me languid and weak beyond anything I ever felt before.

“ Thus far I wrote last week, and since that a very unpleasant circumstance has occurred, which you may read in exaggerated colours in the public prints: I will therefore endeavour to give you the true version. A short time since, Mrs. Wilson, who, in her zeal for my interests, enforces more economy on my household than I consider necessary, discovered the dairy-maid in various peculations, and discharged her. It was not easy to find a successor, in consequence, I believe, of the report of the house being haunted; but at length one of farmer Jones’s daughters (you know he rents the farm whose close vicinity to the hall renders it a very great eyesore) undertook the situation, which proved a sinecure; for on the second day after her instalment in office, two of the cows were found lying dead in one of the fields, and their companions so terribly mutilated, we were obliged to have them

shot immediately. On the same morning, a paper was affixed to the hall door, informing me that it would be needless to replace the animals, as the same fate awaited the fresh stock ; but that if I would dismiss the new dairy-woman, and take back the old one, all would be right. This is the second time I have been subjected to a menace of this description, and yet ours is a land of liberty, Caroline !

“ Of course, I shall not turn off a well-disposed servant, but as it would be absurd to buy cows merely to be tortured, we have at present no dairy, and depend on the farm for supplies. I have been, as you may suppose, not a little vexed by this business ; but in one respect it appears likely to issue in good, for Mrs. Wilson, who seemed hitherto to have a mania for remaining at Eldersleigh, has been fairly frightened out of it, and is now quite willing to remove. She dreads the sea, and as London would not be pleasant at this season of the year, we think of spending the remaining part of the winter at Bath. My spirits rise at the

prospect of getting away from this horrible place, and I sincerely hope there will be no unnecessary delay in our departure. I see Mr. Wickham riding up the avenue, and shall not close my letter, as he will have, I am sure, some friendly message to transmit to you.

“ Our visiter is gone, and, I grieve to say, not without giving such a description of the state of the roads, and of the disturbances in different parts of the country, that Mrs. Wilson, panic-struck, ‘ hopes I will not think of venturing from home.’ Her health is so delicate, and her nerves so much shattered by all the frights we have had, that I dare not press the matter; so we remain; and I must comfort myself with reflecting that Langton may prove a more cheerful residence. By the way, Caroline, do you think Mr. Wickham’s character entirely free from selfishness? I was not quite satisfied with his manner this morning.

“ Yours ever,

“ F. C. MOUBRAY.”

Mrs. Hartfield was much distressed by the intelligence conveyed in Miss Moubrey's letter; for however zealously she had formerly advocated Mr. Wickham's suit, the discovery she had subsequently made had altogether altered her opinion; and although she could not blame her friend, the peculiar nature of whose circumstances called so imperatively for a protector, it was impossible not to feel that a union contracted with Wickham, while it was evident her affection for Lord St. Maur remained in full force, offered little prospect of happiness. Mrs. Hartfield's first impulse was to write immediately, entreating Cecil to consider well the step she was about to take, but the reflection that the caution would probably come too late, withheld her. And long and painfully she mused on the strange destiny which, in defiance of a resolution firmly made, and hitherto as firmly acted upon,—in spite of beauty, wealth, talents, all that could attract or captivate, entailed on Cecil Moubrey the two-fold misery of unrequited

love and a marriage of convenience. Then her true heart rose indignantly against him whose hand had carelessly thrown in the bitter drug which had thus poisoned Cecil's cup of life. Her meditations were interrupted by the announcement of a most unexpected visiter.

But Cecil wronged Mr. Wickham in suspecting him of selfishness; it formed, in truth, no feature of his character; and if, in the present instance, there were in his conduct anything bearing the semblance of that too common, but most unamiable trait, it was merely the selfishness of the doubtful lover, who knew his best hopes of success rested on Miss Moubray's remaining at Eldersleigh. There, everything favoured him; there, he might be said to walk over the ground; but let her once leave her present secluded home, let her appear in town, Brighton, or even the most retired watering-place, and she would instantly be surrounded by a crowd of suitors, before whose superior claims his must inevitably fall. Perhaps, too,

from having himself lived altogether in —shire, he did not fully appreciate the difficulties she found so overwhelming, and with which her former life and education rendered her less equal to contend than would have been the case had she been altogether brought up at Eldersleigh.

CHAPTER X.

TIME dragged heavily on ; a new year dawned, but no change had taken place in the position in which stood Wickham and Cecil Moubray, as regarded each other ; for though her “woman’s will,” weak as her nature, had bowed before the current of events, and she had even brought herself to consider her marriage with him as a desirable circumstance,—although, the resolution once taken, a sort of calm tranquillity overspread her mind, she was yet in no hurry to act upon it. And, as the fact of her no longer looking on him merely as a friend took away in some

degree from the former cordiality of her manner, his excessive timidity still prevented his hazard-ing a declaration. At length, however, weary of the torture of suspense, he summoned up his courage, and called at Eldersleigh one morning earlier than usual, hoping thus to find her alone, and resolved to ascertain his fate.

But Cecil, who, for many reasons, rarely left the immediate precincts of her house, was on that day absent, in consequence of having re-cieved a note from Mrs. Styleigh, requesting her presence at the Rectory, as she wished to consult her on some plan of charity, but was herself confined to the house by a severe cold. Mrs. Styleigh was alone, her daughters being absent on a Christmas visit to a married sister. And as Cecil listened to her benevolent suggestions, and witnessed her anxiety to do good, she could not help feeling that up to that hour she had never done her justice, and she was really sorry when one o' clock and luncheon broke up the-tête-à tête.

With luncheon came the doctor,—the doctor, too, in ill-humour ; which ill-humour was vented, as such ebullitions usually are, on those possessing the power neither of resistance nor retaliation. His lady and his curate were his victims ; the first was talked at because the mutton-chops were hard ; the second, who was there in obedience to a summons from his rector, was soundly rated, because three churchmen had lately joined the dissenters, owing, the reverend doctor affirmed, to the want of proper watchfulness on the part of Munday. The young man coloured violently ; and Cecil, aware that her presence must increase his annoyance, begged that her carriage might be brought round, as she did not like being out late, and wished to call on Mrs. Munday before returning home.

That lady's residence was not a picturesque cottage, with woodbine covered porch, deep shelving roof, and casement windows ; but a small cockney-looking house, with a door in the centre, and merely separated from the public

road by a narrow strip of ground, up the middle of which ran a straight gravel walk. Still, there was an air of neatness in the exterior; and, small as was the simply furnished room dignified by the name of drawing-room, no one could have doubted the gentility, or rather the refinement, of its occupants. The various topics of the day having been gone through, the conversation turned to that subject ever dearest to a mother's heart—her son; and Cecil, anxious, to gratify a person, possessing so few sources of enjoyment, indignant, too, at the scene she had just witnessed, spoke warmly in his praise.

“He is, indeed,” replied the pleased mother, “he is, indeed, all that a parent's heart could wish. Nor, when I see his devotedness to his Master's service, ought I to regret that, being left his sole guardian, I suffered him to follow his earnest wish to enter the ministry; and yet, my dear young friend, there are seasons when I fear I have hardly acted wisely,—at least, as far as concerns his earthly happiness; for much I

dread, I have allowed my noble-minded son to doom himself to a life of poverty with all its bitter trials. It is true that, with a mother's pride, I fondly thought, that, gifted as he is, Francis must surely rise ; but I am now becoming painfully aware, that, even in his profession, talents and virtue must be backed by influence, or they will avail their possessor nothing ; and this reflection often much depresses me."

" But you must not dwell upon it, dear Mrs. Munday. Your son has many friends who will advance his interests. Mr. Wickham, I am certain, would gladly see him rector of Langton, if he thought so poor a living worthy of his acceptance ; but I fear it is not better than a curacy ; indeed, as there is no house, it is not, I believe, so valuable as what Mr. Munday at present holds."

My son would gladly have accepted it," replied Mrs. Munday, " even had the emolument been less ; for there are circumstances connected with his present engagement which

render it highly painful to his feelings." (Cecil was at no loss to guess the circumstances alluded to.) "But Mr. Wickham has other views for Langton."

"Oh, Mrs. Munday, I can hardly think that; I am certain Mr. Wickham would rejoice were your son installed at Langton. Mr. Munday should speak to him—he should, indeed; or, if he feels any delicacy in making a direct application, you must let me be the medium of communication; I am certain I should be able to send you a favourable report."

Mrs. Munday smiled sadly. "Your interest in that quarter would, I have no doubt, be most influential in every other instance; but here, I am afraid, even your interposition would be fruitless. The living is destined for a cousin of Mr. Wickham's, who has just taken orders; and even were it otherwise, my poor boy would have no chance—we are not favourites at Langton." Then suddenly recollecting the reported engagement between Mr. Wickham and our heroine,

Mrs. Munday turned the conversation, by inquiring if Miss Moubrey knew why Dr. Styleigh wished so particularly to see her son that morning; and Cecil, feeling it impossible to contradict her assertion respecting Mr. Wickham's prejudice, replied; and shortly after took her leave.

It was, perhaps, well for Mr. Wickham's wishes that he had left Eldersleigh before Miss Moubrey returned home, for her conversation with Mrs. Munday had left an impression on her mind by no means favourable to him. His reasons for preferring a raw Cambridge youth to the conscientious laborious Munday were certainly questionable; the circumstance of his disliking the persons whose society she was anxious to cultivate was painful, and that he did dislike them was beyond doubt; she thought, too, that, previous to disposing of the living, he should have consulted her wishes. And as it never entered into her imagination that jealousy had any part in the business, all

these things combined gave rise to uncomfortable apprehensions in Cecil's mind ; and she asked herself, with some uneasiness, whether, under an appearance of so much sedateness and general rectitude of conduct, there might not yet lurk much that would prove inimical to her future happiness.

While they were yet in the dining-room, Mrs. Wilson's medical attendant came in to pay an evening visit, and Cecil gladly availed herself of the opportunity to retire to her own apartment. There, seated near the fire, she had just fallen into that dreamy state of mind so eagerly welcomed by those whose theme of meditation is not pleasing, because it sometimes ushers in oblivion, when the door of the room opened, and Mrs. Wilson, entering abruptly, informed her that Mr. Wickham was below stairs. Cecil, neither pleased with the interruption, nor its cause, answered with some little petulance, “ that she was fatigued, and should not leave her room again that evening.”

“ But, my dear Miss Moubrey, you really should make an effort ; this is the second time he has called to-day ; it is quite clear he is anxious to speak to you, and, if you persist in remaining above stairs, may perhaps consider it as a refusal.”

But Cecil maintained her purpose, and shortly after Mrs. Wilson’s return to the drawing-room, Wickham took his leave.

In the dead of that night, Cecil was roused from a deep sleep by a tremendous crash. In the first moment of alarm, she thought of sickness, housebreaking, of their mysterious visitant, and laid her hand upon the bell-string, but it gave way instantly. Then, uncertain how to act, she listened eagerly for a recurrence of the sound ; it came again, hollow—deep—unearthly—and then a heavy footstep slowly and measuredly advanced along the passage.

Cecil feared not the dead, but the living she did fear ; and when she heard that heavy footstep pause at the very threshold of her chamber,

and felt how entirely she was in the power of an ill-designing person, her frame became congealed with terror, her voice failed, and she lay silent, motionless, anxiously watching for the receding steps. But all was still ; an hour passed away, and she was yet uncertain whether the object of her apprehension had or had not withdrawn.

Her first care on the following morning was indirectly to ascertain whether Mrs. Wilson had been equally disturbed, and a superstitious thrill of horror passed over her on hearing that no sound whatever had broken that lady's rest. It is idle to reason against fear, as useless to hope by argument to chase away any strong impression from the mind ; time alone will efface the latter, experience overcome the first. It is only when we *know* our fears to be unfounded that we laugh at them ; it is not until the sharp edge is blunted, or the warm tint passed away, that we are willing to admit the absurdity of those chimeras of our fancy which, in their day

of newness and of strength, have held our moral powers in an iron spell, mocking each effort to break through the bonds. And yet it sometimes happens that after every struggle for the soul's freedom has proved abortive, every endeavour to chase away the dark foreboding vain, a mere trifle will in an instant turn the whole current of our thoughts, and once more give to reason her due balance in the mind.

“ See, my dear Miss Moubrey,” said Mrs. Wilson, as Cecil entered the breakfast-room, “ what a beautiful present Mr. Wickham has sent you ; roses, moss roses,—fresh, sweet, and lovely, as those we gather in the midst of summer; surely, even Lord St. Maur’s conservatories, of which you speak so often, could not have produced finer specimens. Here is a note, too, for you.” Cecil’s countenance brightened ; (who, in the month of January, could receive roses with a clouded brow ?) and her smile became still sweeter as she perused the note. It was principally one of inquiry for her indis-

position the previous evening, and expressive of sorrow that county business would prevent his calling in person to ask for her ; but it breathed so much friendliness that Cecil regretted the want of courtesy she had evinced in refusing to leave her room. Then, struck by his forbearance, and gratified by this tribute to her taste, from one who took no interest himself in flowers, she blamed herself severely for the unfavourable thoughts she had harboured towards him.

A landscape, veiled in the misty darkness that precedes a hurricane, and that same landscape, smiling and radiant in the noonday sun, does not present a greater contrast than did the tone of Cecil Moubray's mind before and after this communication. She had entered the room languid and spiritless, for she felt that, should her estimate of Wickham's character prove false, the last ray which shed a gleam of hope across her earthly pilgrimage would be extinguished. And although she could, and did,

look beyond the horizon,—although she knew that sorrow is the appointed lot of man, and sometimes his best blessing, because it is the means of leading him to God,—still, she shuddered at the dreary prospect, and trembled as her future melancholy life cast its dark shadow over her. She did not murmur, she did not repine ; but she was dejected and cast down. But that single bunch of roses, those few kind lines, had given a different colouring to her thoughts, and she could once more contemplate her projected union not only without mistrust but with complacency.

With the daylight, however, vanished much of this cheerfulness ; and often during the course of the evening, while Mrs. Wilson sat dozing in her easy chair, and Cecil plied her pencil, she found occasion to call back her wayward thoughts, which ever rested on the past ; that past she would so gladly have forgotten, but to which her memory still so fondly and so

treacherously clung. All that was painful was forgotten, all that was melancholy obliterated from her mind, while the bright, the joyous, and the pleasing, stood forth in vivid portraiture, as if to throw a deeper gloom upon her future anxieties and present fears.

“ I see how it is,” she said, mentally, casting her eyes round the room. “ I have too much that reminds me of past happiness; this must not be allowed, or I shall never be able to reconcile myself to my future destiny. That ottoman Lady Newrystown gave me shall be made up, and placed in the drawing-room, in order that I may ever bear in mind for whom I have been forgotten. But everything else that can bring Selwood to my recollection, shall be put away. You, my poor Daisy, I will give to Mrs. Munday; she will, I know, be kind to you; this ring, too, I will wear no more,—it was my own sweet Mary’s gift, and I must cease to think of her.” And a tear fell on Mary’s ring,

and a tear fell as she caressed her little favourite, and Cecil thought those tears fell all for Mary.

“I think,” said Mrs. Wilson, rousing herself, “I feel so chilly and unwell this evening, I shall be obliged to go to bed as soon as tea is over. Pray, Wilcox, shut the door; these draughts cut one to pieces. What a storm!”

“It is, indeed, a fearful night,” replied Cecil, “and the drifting snow will render the roads quite impassable.”

“Yes, ma’am, and the more’s the pity, for ‘tis time the military was arrived,” said Wilcox, with a very peculiar expression of countenance.

In pursuance of her resolution, Mrs. Wilson retired immediately after tea; and Cecil, after seeing her to her apartment, was on her return to the sitting-room, when her attention was suddenly caught by a succession of rapid flashes of light which illuminated the upper end of the gallery; and, darting towards a

window, she perceived, with equal horror and astonishment, that farmer Jones's house and homestead were in flames. Nothing is more appalling, at the same time nothing more fascinating, than fire ; we shudder while we behold, yet cannot withdraw our aching gaze ; there is something so strange, so terrible, and yet withal so graceful, in the action of that destructive element ! Yes, we gaze on, although we know that ruin and destruction will be the end of what we look upon.

“Who can have done this dreadful deed ?” Cecil cried, at length, to some of the affrighted servants, who were gradually collecting round.

“Those that seek vengeance,” said a hoarse voice, close behind her.

“Vengeance ! and for what ?” she again asked, turning towards the side from whence the sound had come.

“For injustice,” replied Burton, (for he it was who had spoken.) “Do you think Jenkins will tamely see his daughter wronged ?”

“ What does he mean ?” once more inquired Cecil.

“ La, ma’am,” said Mason, “ he means that it is all done out of spite, because Susan Jones came here as dairymaid after Sarah Jenkins was turned away. I’m sure I hope you’ll send Susan off to-morrow ; they’ll be setting fire to the Hall itself next, the shocking wretches. I knew no good would come of Mrs. Wilson’s interference.”

“ May be to-morrow will be too late,” muttered the old gamekeeper.

“ Burton,” cried Cecil, “ how is it you are here to-night ? Why have you left the lodge ?”

“ Because, ma’am, the place is threatened, and I could do no good there ; but mayhap, if they do attack the Hall, my arm may be of some use, though it’s thought too old and stiff to bring down a pheasant or partridge,” he sneeringly replied.

Cecil felt that, in case of such an emergency, Burton was far more likely to prove a foe than a

friend ; her thanks for his proffered assistance were therefore cold, and she then added, “ I do not, however, believe your services will be called for ; I cannot think they will dare to attack the Hall.”

“ You may find, madam, to your cost, they both can and will have vengeance. The Jones’s will of course seek shelter here, and if you give it them, nothing can save you.”

“ At any rate, I will take the risk,” said Cecil. “ Never shall it be said that a Moubrey refused shelter to a friend.”

“ Oh, ma’am,” cried Mason, “ pray don’t ; remember, you’re but a woman ; we’re all nothing but women ; don’t be *haggravating* the ruffians, they’re equal to anything.”

“ Indeed, ma’am,” said Wilcox, in a low tone, “ what Burton says is very true ; it would be very dangerous to take in the Jones’s.”

“ It matters not,” Miss Moubrey answered ; “ it is on my account that they have suffered, and it would be base and cowardly were I to refuse

what shelter and protection I can give. It is my duty to receive them, and while I am in the path of duty a higher power will watch over me."

" If it wasn't for the snow," observed Wilcox, " I shouldn't say so much about it ; for if the troops was in the neighbourhood it would alter the case altogether ; but what with the storm, and the wind, and the drifted snow, it's morally impossible they can be here before morning ; and in the meantime there's no telling what mischief may not be done."

" That very circumstance—the inclemency of the weather—renders it more obvious that I may not, with any feeling of humanity or justice, shut my door upon an honest family, who are houseless in consequence of a service they have rendered me ; therefore, let them be admitted without hesitation, and every attention paid to their comfort."

" And supposing," asked Mason, " them cut-throat rabscallions come ?"

“We must give them such a reception as shall prove that, although a woman holds sway at Eldersleigh, there are yet men, and brave ones too, within the walls.” A murmur of applause followed this declaration, for courage and fear are alike contagious ; and as Cecil moved slowly forward, her head erect, her features glowing with enthusiasm, and all the spirit of her ancestors mantling upon her brow, the train of menials caught a portion of her lofty-mindedness, even the churlish gamekeeper was softened into admiration of a creature at once so beautiful and brave.

But courage, active courage, at least, is not a female attribute. The excitement of the moment soon passed off, nature reassumed her sway, and she became once more a woman—a very woman, trembling at every sound, fearfully alive to every risk, and scarcely able to repress a shriek of terror as she imagined she could distinguish the angry voices of the multitude amidst the fury of the raging storm. She tried to pray,

she tried to feel that she was in the hands of an Almighty friend who would protect and keep her; but her unsettled thoughts refused to take the form of words, and, in the turmoil of her mind, her faith was clouded and unsteady. For, while affliction humbles us, while in our sorrows we can turn to God, and trouble is often the only road to the one resting-place, terror is an overwhelming passion which, during its paroxysms, unseats the reason, and, by rendering the faculties inert, destroys all free moral agency. Fear acts upon the mind as opium on the body.

And, ere long, her apprehensions received an additional stimulus: there were, indeed, voices, not, however, of the thronged multitude, but the sounds of mirth, of riot, of drunkenness, within doors. Cecil had desired that, as it would be necessary to watch throughout that night, refreshments of every description should be liberally distributed amongst the servants, and this was the result; and when she would have expostulated with Wilcox on the impro-

priety of allowing such proceedings, she perceived he was himself in no state either to listen to admonition or control the rest of the household. Still she gained one gleam of comfort from his unconnected answers,—the Jones's were at Eldersleigh ; and as sufficient time had elapsed for the rioters to have reached the Hall without their having made their appearance, it was just possible they had been diverted from their purpose. Another hour had passed, during which, excepting when raised in earnest supplication, Cecil's eyes had never been withdrawn from the or molu timepiece which stood over the chimney, and her security was gradually acquiring strength, when suddenly, amidst the howling of the storm, she heard, distinctly heard, the Hall door bell pulled violently : her gasping breath came thick and rapidly, her heart beat as though it would have burst its bonds, and the aural faculty was strained to a pitch that would have rendered the sweetest note in music exquisitely painful. There was

another terrifying peal,—another,—and another; she again summoned Wilcox.

“ Do you not hear that bell ?”

“ Yes, ma’am,” replied the affrighted man, “ I do indeed; and what’s to be done I’m sure I don’t know, for if we goes to the door they’ll rush in and murder us all; and if we doesn’t, they’ll set fire to the house from spite. Depend upon it, they’re bent on mischief, or they wouldn’t keep themselves so quiet.”

“ On no account let a door be opened,” said Miss Moubrey; “ speak to them from a window above stairs. And hear me, Wilcox; it is absurd, it would be madness, to think of defending Eldersleigh; therefore you must give them money,—anything they want, but do nothing to irritate them.”

“ Oh, Miss Moubrey,” cried Mason, who had followed Wilcox into the drawing-room, and now remained behind, “ what will become of us !”

“ Listen, listen !” said Cecil, but they could

distinguish nothing but the storm. Suddenly, two shots were fired in quick succession.

“ He has misunderstood me !” exclaimed Cecil, in an agony of terror ; “ he has misunderstood me, and is trying to drive them off. Let me pass, Mason !” And she would have flown herself to correct the error, but her failing limbs refused to do their office, and she fell motionless into a chair. “ Run, Mason !—quick, quick ; tell him to offer anything, to give all they may require, but to desist from using force.”

In obedience to her mistress’s command, Mason opened the door, but immediately closed it again. “ Ma’am, we shall be all undone ; Wilcox is unbarring the Hall door.”

“ Impossible,” cried Cecil, “ he never can be doing so mad a thing.”

“ It’s as true as I’m alive, Miss Moubrey ; don’t you hear the bolts ?”

Cecil, indeed, did hear the bolts undrawn, the lock turned, and the ponderous door swing on

its hinges. The next moment, that near which Mrs. Mason stationed herself was thrown open with a violence which sent her reeling into the centre of the room. Cecil uttered a faint scream, then pressed her hands upon her aching eyeballs, in order to shut out the hideous vision she expected to behold.

But a friendly footstep echoed through the Hall,—a friendly greeting fell upon her ear,—Lord St. Maur advanced to meet her; and, overcome by terror, anxiety, surprise, and joy, she well nigh threw herself into his arms. Then, ashamed of her emotion, spoke of the preceding danger, of the astonishment his unexpected appearance had occasioned; and received, in answer, assurances of safety,—now quite unnecessary, for *he* was by her side, and Cecil feared no longer,—and apologies for so abrupt an arrival, which she thought equally uncalled for. In truth, Lord St. Maur's sudden approach had nearly cost him his life,—the con-

tents of a double-barrelled gun, discharged by accident, having pierced his travelling cap.

He had been summoned home in consequence of the unsettled state of the country; from Mathews had heard of the bad spirit prevailing in her neighbourhood, and, without loss of time, had set out for Eldersleigh. The unfavourable weather had detained him on the journey; and, finally, finding the road across the park impracticable from the high banks of drifted snow, he had been obliged to send his carriage back to the village, and, followed only by his foreign servant, reached the Hall on foot. Mary, who was rather better, was left at Naples in Lady Newrystown's care.

Thus much Cecil learnt by snatches; for no connected conversation took place that evening between her and her very welcome guest,—there was too much confusion: men servants hurrying backwards and forwards with refreshments; women clustering round the door to listen to

assurances of their safety, and perhaps hoping to obtain a glance of the handsome nobleman, who seemed to have dropped amongst them from the clouds; whilst, above all the din, rose the shrill tones of Mrs. Mason's voice, who, notwithstanding the little ceremony with which she had been treated, chose to continue for some time in the drawing-room, dilating on the excessive terror she had undergone. In fact, the household had lost its equilibrium, and could not easily regain its centre of gravity. Cecil almost questioned the reality of the scene; it was a fairy tale—a dream—anything but truth.

As she retired to rest, she paused for a few moments near the window that commanded the desolated farm. Excepting some heavy wreaths of smoky vapour, which rose from time to time from the devoted spot, the heavens were now serenely clear, and the frosty moonbeams gave a distinct view of the blackened ruins,—the dusky masses being rendered more conspicuous by the strong contrast they afforded to the glistening mantle of the snow-clad earth. In the remote distance,

on the verge of the horizon, a stone mansion, well embowered in trees, was visible,—that house was Langton : Cecil looked once toward it, then quickly turned away as from something loathsome ; and when, in the solitude of her chamber, she poured forth her praise and gratitude for her late deliverance, she felt that the discovery she had that night made of her real sentiments with regard to Lord St. Maur, which put all idea of her marrying Wickham at an end, happening, as it did, ere she was entangled in an engagement from which she would have found it difficult to recede, called, in reality, for more heartfelt thankfulness than even the opportune arrival of the troops, whose appearance in the neighbourhood had alone saved her property from the savage fury of the mob.

CHAPTER XI.

How blissful was the sense of security that pervaded Cecil's waking thoughts on the following morning ! And as she summed over in her mind all her late sources of apprehension, with what intense pleasure did she dwell on the manner in which Lord St. Maur had gently chid her for exposing herself to such alarms, and the almost tenderness that beamed from his dark expressive eyes, as, half reproachfully, he inquired why, in her difficulties, she had not applied to him ?

“ Oh, ma’am,” said Miss Moubrey’s loquacious waiting woman, while assisting her to dress, “ to think of the deliverance we’ve had !”

“ It is indeed a merciful escape, and we have great cause for thankfulness.”

“ Yes, ma’am ; I’m sure I can think of nothing else, and couldn’t sleep all night for dreaming the house was on fire, and everything else that was shocking, for you know, ma’am, that if it hadn’t been for the milintary and Lord St. Maur we might all have been put to death.”

“ Are any of the rioters secured ?”

“ Five, ma’am, of the ringleaders ; they’re safe lodged in gaol, and I hope they’ll be hanged directly ; and if he as could be wicked enough to fire at such a handsome gentleman as Lord St. Maur was to be hanged too it would only be what he deserves.”

“ You surely do not mean to insinuate that the gun was not discharged accidentally ?”

“ Burton says it was, but, for my part, I must say I think it very *himprobable* that both barrels of a gun should fire themselves off, and take such good aim too. I’ve been a looking at his lordship’s travelling cap, and if you’ll believe it,

ma'am, the ball went clean through, and I dare-say spoilt ever so many of them beautiful curls; —shocking, to be sure! Besides, how did it happen that Burton, who has been a gamekeeper all his life, and quite natural to guns, shouldn't know how to manage one better?"

"It is singular; but you had better, for the present, keep your opinions to yourself," remarked Cecil, who remembered, not without a shudder, that Burton might be one of those who loved vengeance. And then the reflection that Lord St. Maur's life had been in peril for her sake, gave him a still deeper interest in her affections. They were joined by Mrs. Wilson, who, owing to the storm, the thickness of the walls and ceilings, and her own tendency to somnolency, had heard nothing of the disturbance of the preceding night, and was now brimful of astonishment.

"But, my dear Miss Moubrey," she said, at length, after having in some degree exhausted her expressions of surprise and terror, "what

are we to do for his lordship's breakfast? Not a drop of cream or milk, not a slice of fresh butter,—at least, none that would be fit for him, accustomed as he must be to every delicacy; and where we are to get it now the farm's burnt, I'm sure I can't divine; it's absurd, at this hour of the day, to think of sending to —; and you know they're very badly off at the Rectory themselves just now."

"La, ma'am, you needn't fuss yourself at all about it," said Nancy, pertly; "it's all been seen to long ago; and there's plenty of everything been sent down from Langton. My haunt thought of the Rectory, but just as we was going to send who should come in but one of Squire Wickham's men, with cream, and eggs, and all sorts of things."

"How very thoughtful," said Cecil, faintly, and turning rather pale.

"Just what might be expected from him," replied Mrs. Wilson, as, with a relieved mind and most important air, she bustled out of the room.

However anxious for the comfort of her guest, Cecil would rather he should have been under the necessity of eating stale butter than have herself incurred an obligation to one who might consider himself aggrieved by her; for it was impossible to deny, that, borne down by a singular combination of circumstances, and mistaking the nature of her feelings, she had conducted herself towards Mr. Wickham in a manner which had, probably, given rise to expectations that must issue in painful disappointment. But there yet remained a chance that, as he had so long delayed seeking an explanation, she might contrive to elude it altogether, and thus spare him the mortification of a refusal, and herself the loss of his esteem and friendship; and, young and sanguine, and easily believing what she wished, Miss Moubrey descended to the breakfast-room, hoping, or rather more than hoping, that Mr. Wickham would not propose,—but that *somebody* else would.

“Cecil, foolish Cecil, build no such castles; they will surely fall.” And so they did, for ere another hour had elapsed, her bright, brief gleam of happiness was gone. A letter from Mr. Wickham lay upon the table, and all Lord St. Maur’s cordiality of feeling seemed to have passed away. There was, however, no lack of conversation during the meal, for although the Earl appeared languid and spiritless, and our heroine was too flurried and anxious to converse with any degree of freedom, Dr. Styleigh had called to inquire for the ladies, and pay his respects to their noble guest; and where the doctor was, silence was not. He talked incessantly of the state of the country,—danger to which the church was exposed,—crisis that was at hand, &c. &c. ; and Cecil, thankful for the seasonable relief his presence afforded, actually thought him a gentlemanlike sensible man.

If anything could have increased the annoyance with which she broke the seal of Wickham’s letter, it would have been the tone of his com-

munication; humble almost to hopelessness, and yet so fraught with manly sincerity that it was impossible to question the affection of the writer. It was long ere she could frame an answer which, in any measure, satisfied her; but at length the disagreeable task was ended, and, returning to the drawing-room, she found Mrs. Wilson alone; Lord St. Maur had ridden out in company with Dr. Styleigh.

The surprise occasioned by this fresh proof of his indifference greatly subsided when she learnt that they were gone to Ashford, "there being," the doctor said, "a prospect of Lord Ashford's arrival that day." It was, therefore, on her account Lord St. Maur had absented himself; and impatience for his return, vague fears for his safety, together with a hundred little cares for his comfort and amusement, flitted across her mind as she wandered restlessly about, altering again and again the disposition of the furniture and ornaments in the sitting room, or tuned her

harp until she lost the power of distinguishing the sounds it gave forth, or sang the airs he had formerly best loved to hear.

In the course of the afternoon, Francis Munday called, and Cecil heard Mrs. Wilson ask him to dinner with far more satisfaction than usually followed the invitations that hospitable individual was in the habit of dispensing. She was glad he should be paid the compliment; she felt assured Lord St. Maur would be pleased with his society, and perhaps, if the truth must be told, she remembered, with no little complacency, that Mrs. Wilson would naturally fall to Munday's share, and thus leave her entirely at liberty to devote herself to Lord St. Maur.

The Earl did not return until a late hour, and then without having accomplished the ostensible object of his ride; far from having arrived at Ashford, Lord A. was not even expected. But there were more favourable accounts of the state of the country; the military had been considerably reinforced, several of the rioters secured,

and tranquillity might now be confidently looked for.

All this was very cheering, but Miss Moubray would have received it with much greater pleasure had Lord St. Maur, in making the recital, only addressed himself a little more exclusively to her; or if, when he did, she could have detected some of that tenderness of voice and manner so obvious on the preceding night; but no—he was polite, ceremoniously polite, and nothing further; and, to complete her mortification and disappointment, instead of manifesting any wish to enter into conversation with her in the evening, actually challenged Mrs. Wilson to play piquet. The flowers and scarlet ribbon wherewith the elderly lady's cap was decorated quivered in unison with her ecstatic feelings, as bridling, smiling, and looking the very picture of importance, she took her seat opposite her noble antagonist. Cecil placed herself at the piano, and, at Mr. Munday's instance, sang some of Handel's

music with such pathetic sweetness, that when, at his usual early hour, the young minister returned to his humble home, he asked himself, with great bitterness of spirit, why, with taste to admire, a heart to love, an understanding to estimate, the value of such a being, his lot was so cast that it was madness, folly, presumption even to raise his thoughts to her ?

Perhaps there is no class of the community more truly to be pitied than the inferior members of our establishment. Generally speaking, well-born, educated as gentlemen, and possessing all the refinement such an education and birth would naturally bestow, their calling and habits in life giving a peculiar relish to the comforts of the social fireside, yet they are debarred from them, and condemned, for the most part at least, to lead a life of cheerless solitude. A young country curate is, of all men, the most dependent on female society ; still he cannot marry—he is too poor—he must be satisfied to wait until some happy turn of circumstances (a turn which, by

the bye, may not take place until he is fifty years old, perhaps not at all,) puts him in possession of a better income. No industry, no piety, no talents, no effort on his part, will avail him anything; time, chance, and patronage, are his only hopes;—unless, indeed, he be content to barter his affections, and sacrifice his feelings, by selecting a tolerably well-dowered widow, his senior by some years; or an old spinster with some thousand pounds in the funds, and as many wrinkles in her face; or choose for the partner of his life a more wealthy beauty, in the shape of Miss Snubbs, the tallow-chandler's daughter, who thinks her fifteen thousand pounds, and house in Tooley-street, a fair exchange for marrying a “real gentleman,” neither of which alternatives promise much happiness any more than the prospect of ten children and a wife to be supported out of perhaps, two hundred pounds a year, in case he chooses to consult his inclination and marry in his own grade. Truly, I have sometimes thought

(though, perhaps, it will be deemed heretical to promulgate such an opinion) that if the Roman-catholic church *enjoins* celibacy on her ministers, ours *entails* it, in nine cases out of ten, as far, at least, as young clergymen are concerned. But Mr. Munday has reached home, and we will return to the drawing-room at Eldersleigh, where the game at piquet has broken up, and Mrs. Wilson, according to her invariable practice, has ordered in the supper tray.

“ My dear Miss Moubrey, if it be not tiring you too much, pray favour us with that song you were singing this morning,—I mean the Spanish air of which Mr. Wickham is so fond. Is your lordship partial to the guitar? It forms, I think, a very pretty accompaniment to the voice, and, if gracefully held, is highly picturesque looking,” said Mrs. Wilson, with rather a proud glance at her former pupil.

“ The guitar certainly constitutes no inconsiderable addition to the attractions of the Spanish ladies,” replied Lord St. Maur, with-

out in the least following the direction of Mrs. Wilson's eyes ; in fact, he had been sitting with his back towards Cecil ; and although, on breaking up the game, he had shifted his posture, he still appeared anxious to look at anything rather than Miss Moubray, whose ill-assured voice and trembling fingers did little justice to Mr. Wickham's favourite air.

“ Thank you, my dear,” said Mrs. Wilson, when the song was concluded ; “ it's very pretty,—very pretty, indeed ; but I think I've heard you sing it with more spirit ; perhaps, however, it was not quite fair to ask you for it to-night.” The last words were pronounced in a very low tone, as though Mrs. Wilson had been thinking aloud, and she then fell into a reverie concerning the cause of Mr. Wickham's non-appearance at the Hall that day. It was interrupted by Lord St. Maur's mentioning, with some abruptness, that, as his presence at Eldersleigh was no longer in the slightest degree necessary, he intended taking his departure .

early on the following morning. The information caused much unpleasant surprise to both ladies, for Cecil, notwithstanding the Earl's capricious conduct, was perfectly unprepared for so sudden a movement; and Mrs. Wilson, almost beside herself at being treated with so much polite deference by a man of his high rank, fully meditated a large dinner party, in order that she might shew persons by whom she had been slighted the difference between them and this well-bred nobleman.

“ To-morrow,” she exclaimed ; “ you think of leaving Eldersleigh to-morrow ? Impossible ! Indeed, indeed, we cannot hear of such a thing ; the weather is still very unfit for travelling, and it will terrify us out of our wits should we be left alone again so soon. Let me entreat you to defer your journey for a few days at least. Miss Moubray, join your voice to mine ; I’m certain, Lord St. Maur’s speedy departure will be a severe disappointment to you ; tell him he must give us a few more days of his agreeable society.”

Cecil had been engaged replacing her music, but she now approached the table near which they were standing.

“No, my dear Mrs. Wilson, I will not be so selfish; Lord St. Maur has already made a great sacrifice, for which I am indeed grateful. But his presence is necessary elsewhere, therefore we must not seek to detain him; and even,” she added, with a smile (a very forced one), “even did we, as in days of yore, possess the power of throwing some potent enchantment round this noble knight, who, in the true spirit of romance and chivalry, flew to us in our hour of danger,—did we, I say, possess this power, and so seek to detain him spell-bound in this lone home of ours, the effort would prove useless; he would, believe me, dissolve the charm, obtain his freedom, and, in requital for our selfishness, vow never to return; for where the *will* is not, vain all entreaty,—fruitless each attempt,—even magic would be powerless in our behalf; there-

fore, I charge you, offer no obstacles to Lord St. Maur's departure."

Mrs. Wilson looked very much inclined to disobey the injunction; but Cecil gave her no time, for, turning to Lord St. Maur, she inquired, quickly, at what hour he intended setting off.

"After breakfast," he replied, in an irresolute tone."

"Then I shall have time to write a few lines, which, I am sure, you will be kind enough to take charge of."

He, of course, assented; and, while Mrs. Wilson took her biscuit and glass of wine, as usual, before retiring to rest, Cecil opened her portfolio, and began selecting some of the drawings. He followed her, and, taking up a sketch-book, stood by her side turning over the leaves.

"I think Mary may be amused with these views, although they are but roughly done," observed Cecil.

“ She will, I have no doubt, highly prize anything from you.”

“ She has not, then, forgotten me ?”

“ Forgotten you ! Oh, no.”

“ My dear Miss Moubray, I think you are hardly aware of the lateness of the hour,” observed Mrs. Wilson, querulously.

“ I had, indeed, forgotten it, but I will not keep you up ; I can finish my packet above stairs,” replied Cecil, hastily gathering together some of the drawings. “ I am quite ready now.”

“ I’ve the honour of wishing your lordship good night,” said Mrs. Wilson, pompously, as she sailed through the open door Lord St. Maur held in his hand.

“ I fear,” he remarked to Cecil, who was closely following, “ I fear I have vexed your friend by my abruptness.”

“ Do not think of it ; Mrs. Wilson has hardly recovered her late alarms ; and women, when frightened, are apt to say and do more than they would under other circumstances,—perhaps

even more than they really feel," replied Miss Moubrey, who heartily wished she had testified less pleasure on his first arrival.

" Still, if, by remaining, I could be of the slightest use ——"

" No, no ; you've already made a great sacrifice, for which again I offer you my most cordial thanks ; besides, it really is quite unnecessary,—it is, indeed. I have come to a resolution, which will effectually prevent any recurrence of our late annoyances ; so do not think of putting yourself to any further inconvenience on our account. The packet shall be ready ; good night." She gave him her hand with entire frankness ; he held it for an instant between both of his, murmured an aspiration for her happiness, and they parted !

As Cecil entered her dressing-room, a note from Wickham was put into her hand.

" To upbraid me, I suppose," she said, rather peevishly ; but before she could ascertain how far the surmise was correct, she was joined

by Mrs. Wilson, in her flannel dressing-gown, who came for the three-fold purpose of expressing her vexation at the Earl's sudden determination to depart; to endeavour to discover from Cecil why Mr. Wickham had not been at Eldersleigh during the day; and, finally, to suggest the propriety of inviting him to breakfast there on the following morning, in order that the settlements might be talked over and arranged before Lord St. Maur took his leave.

“ You know, my dear Miss Moubray,” she said, in conclusion, “ if you will be kind enough to write the note, John can take it when he goes to Langton in the morning for the cream and butter; it is better we should send than give Mr. Wickham that trouble.

As may be imagined, Cecil strenuously opposed the plan, but not with entire success. The business of the settlements Mrs. Wilson did consent to waive, but butter and cream must be provided for the breakfast table; and, until their own dairy could be re-stocked, to seek

supplies elsewhere would, she affirmed, "have a most extraordinary effect, and give great offence to Mr. Wickham."

It had been Cecil's intention to preserve an entire silence respecting the offer she had just received ; for, in addition to that feeling of honour which binds (or ought to bind) a woman on such an occasion, she was particularly anxious to save Mr. Wickham the painful mortification of being pointed at in the county as a rejected man ; still, to be indebted for her household supplies to him, after what had passed, was impossible ; and as Mrs. Wilson resolutely declined being put on short commons, merely, as she fancied, to gratify some absurd scruple of Miss Moubrey's, it became imperative to lay the truth before her ; and this, after many injunctions to secrecy, especially as regarded Lord St. Maur, was done.

Perfectly overwhelmed with surprise and disappointment, the poor old lady sunk heavily into an easy chair, whose spring cushions never

again recovered their elasticity. She had, to use a common expression, set her heart upon the match, and had done everything in her power to forward it ; for she knew that Miss Moubray must marry, she believed that Wickham was calculated to ensure her happiness ; and as there is a little selfishness in everything we do or think, it is just possible that, in summing up all the pros and cons of the connexion, Mrs. Wilson believed a man of his high moral character and universal benevolence more likely to treat *her* with consideration and liberality, than a gentleman of higher birth or more fashionable habits.

The account of his dismissal, therefore, was even more unpalatable than Lord St. Maur's sudden departure. Wound up to a high pitch of irritability, she asked, again and again, Cecil's reasons for refusing him, and ceased not to lament her unaccountable caprice. Cecil, provoked by her tediousness, and not altogether pleased with Mr. Wickham for his pertina-

city in writing again, at length languidly replied—

“ You know I have never been attached to Mr. Wickham ; and, to say the truth, I think his having left me alone on that dreadful night, proves either a want of energy in his character, or that the affection he professes to entertain for me is but lukewarm.”

“ I can’t agree with you in either respect ; Mr. Wickham had other business to attend to.” And then, after fresh lamentations, the old lady launched forth into an eloquent discourse respecting the danger of remaining at Eldersleigh without a male head to the establishment.

“ You are perfectly correct ; but I am not thinking of continuing here. All that has occurred during the last three months convinces me that, except as an occasional residence during the summer, Eldersleigh is not a fit place for us. I purpose, therefore, breaking up my establishment immediately, and intend writing to an agent to secure a house for me in London, or its vicinity.”

“London! Umph!” said Mrs. Wilson. “I’m afraid, Miss Moubray, that you forget that my strength will not be equal to the bustle and racket of a London life; I never could bear late hours, and, since I have lost my health by living here, it would be madness for me to attempt it.”

“If you are dissatisfied with my plan, you are at liberty to take yourself off,” Cecil felt very much inclined to say; but she respected Mrs. Wilson’s years, she knew and pitied her infirmity of temper, and, after a brief struggle with her own high spirit, answered calmly—

“I should have thought you were aware, that neither my inclination nor my principles would suffer me to lead what is called a gay life; I believe we were sent into this world for nobler purposes than selfish gratification and gaiety; and I remove into the neighbourhood of London, not for amusement, but protection. Pray, my dear friend, think better things of me, than that I shall ever again seek happiness from that world whose friendship is enmity to God.”

Mrs. Wilson, determined not to be pleased, murmured something about “shutting oneself up—being moped to death—living in a convent.”

“I have no idea of becoming a recluse,” interrupted Cecil ; “it is against the *spirit* of the world, its heartless vanity, its forgetfulness of God, that we must guard ; and to do this, it is not surely necessary to avoid all social intercourse with our fellow-creatures, or to abstain from such enjoyments as are rational and harmless. Were I to follow the bent of my feelings, there are perhaps but few persons with whom I should wish to associate, for, to speak candidly, I seldom derive pleasure from the society of any one ; but solitude is a great nourisher of selfishness, and would, I am convinced, be highly injurious to my mind. Indeed, situated as I am, without a close tie, or near relation, it would be highly injudicious were I to break off all communication with my connexions, and former acquaintances or friends. For my part, therefore, although I do not court society,

neither will I shun it ; and with regard to yourself, since you have been an inmate of my house, I have tried to meet, not restrain, your wishes, and such will ever be my endeavour while you are kind enough to remain. But this is hardly the moment for discussion ; it is already late, and I have a note to write to Lady Mary ; to Mrs. Hartfield, also, for, as it seems visits have been exchanged, she will be hurt if I do not send her a few lines.”

Mrs. Wilson felt she had been to blame ; but hers was not a temper that could easily recover itself, much less acknowledge an error ; she therefore contented herself with gloomily wishing Miss Moubray good night, and retired.

“ And now for this unpleasant task,” thought Cecil, opening Wickham’s packet. But she had wronged him ; the letter contained a few lines only, and those were, not to upbraid, but to take leave of her ; to assure her, that notwithstanding his late severe disappointment, his affection remained unaltered, so that, should anything

arise to change the nature of her feelings towards him, she would find him still devoted to her.

Touched by his unswerving attachment, for one moment Cecil asked herself, whether the time would never be when she might reward his constancy; whether she might not even now qualify her refusal, and thus, in some degree, soothe the feelings she had so deeply wounded? But the answer fell like lead upon her heart; it was impossible. Feeling towards Lord St. Maur as she unfortunately did, a union with another, even in contemplation, would be little less than sinful; neither was there kindness in raising hopes so vague and so uncertain.

“No! no!” she exclaimed, sorrowfully, “Wickham, kind, generous Wickham, it is not in my power to heal your grief; for the present you must bear your load; but oh, how light, how *nothing* it appears compared with mine. Time will bring ease to *you*; I shall be forgotten; another, better, worthier of you, will take my place;

but I—I shall ever be alone, unpitied, unsoled. And yet I do believe," she added, as all his moral excellences rose before her mind, "Wickham, I do believe that, had I earlier known your worth, I could have loved you ; as Caroline most truly said, I have thrown away the substance, and I grasp a shadow."

She endeavoured then to begin writing, but in vain ; her hands trembled, sharp pains shot across her temples, and colours of every hue and shade danced before her eyes ; unable to trace a single line, she gave up the fruitless attempt, hoping that the morning would find her less feverish and excited. But a night spent in painful meditations, or distressing conjectures, served only to increase her indisposition, and after a vain effort to rise and dress herself, she returned to bed again with her spirits still more heavily weighed down ; for it seemed now probable that a verbal message to Lord St. Maur, transmitted through Mrs. Wilson, would prove their last farewell.

CHAPTER XII.

BUT noonday came, and Lord St. Maur was still at Eldersleigh, one minute standing at the drawing-room window, as though watching for his carriage, the next slowly pacing the room; while he cast from time to time an uneasy glance towards the door of the apartment, in fact, as completely the picture of irresolution as was Mrs. Wilson of annoyance. For, in addition to other vexations, it was no trifling exercise of temper to a person of her habits that she was obliged, in consequence of Miss Moubrey's non-appearance, to continue there playing the agreeable, at the very time of day when she

imagined the cares of the family most imperatively demanded her presence elsewhere. And she sat, her mouth pursed up, her shoulders raised, her long black knitting pins flying, as if her very life depended on the speedy completion of a white and scarlet boa.

“Thank you, my lord,” she said, as for the fifth time he replaced one of the balls of worsted in her work-basket. “I really feel quite ashamed of my awkwardness—the scissors, too—these things must be bewitched, I think. Pray don’t trouble yourself—” (as the ball fell again.)

“I fear your nerves have hardly recovered your recent alarm.”

“True, very true; I scarcely know myself; and I really am so grieved at Miss Moubrey’s—”

“Would it not be better to send immediately for advice?” quickly interrupted Lord St. Maur, laying his hand upon the bell-string.

“It is not to her health I allude; she is liable to head-aches, and not worse now than I have often seen her; besides, as our medical man is

certain of calling in the course of the day, it would be needless to send. But it really is very provoking that she should have refused Mr. Wickham."

"Refused Mr. Wickham!—refused Mr. Wickham did you say?"

"She has, I assure you; I knew you would be surprised to hear of such singular caprice in a young lady of Miss Moubrey's character."

"I am indeed astonished—I understood you, yesterday, the match was a settled thing, and that Miss Moubrey's inclinations would accompany her hand."

"Indeed, I thought so, I believed Miss Moubrey to be sincerely attached to Mr. Wickham; she has always treated him with marked partiality; indeed, it was only two days ago, something of a little quarrel, I don't exactly know what, had taken place, and gave rise to a coolness, and Miss Moubrey was dreadfully out of spirits; but there came a note and some roses from Langton, and the change was quite extra-

ordinary. She certainly spoke then as though her mind had quite been made up, and she looked forward to the marriage with satisfaction. Did not Mrs. Hartfield tell you of Miss Moubrey's intention?"

"Mrs. Hartfield read me part of a letter she had just received from Cecil."

"Ah! yes,—Mrs. Hartfield—a very sensible person, Mrs. Hartfield." (Lord St. Maur bowed.)

"Mrs. Hartfield was extremely anxious she should accept Mr. Wickham, for she saw, as every one else does, that Miss Moubrey ought to marry, and thought, that although he is not so rich or fashionable as some of the gentlemen who have proposed to her, he was more likely to make her happy. But, dear me! Miss Moubrey particularly desired me to say nothing on the subject; I really quite forgot it; how very unfortunate! but after all, I cannot see why she should object to your lordship's knowing it; for my part, I think, as her relation and former guardian, it is only right you should be told; and

perhaps you will be kind enough to use your influence to make her give up this (I must call it) foolish resolution?"

"I fear my influence with Miss Moubray, even were I inclined to interfere, would avail little."

"Pardon me; Miss Moubray has the highest opinion of your judgment, and would, I really believe, rather follow your advice than that of any other person; which is, you know, quite natural, as you were so long her guardian. And it would indeed be an act of real kindness, were you to dissuade her from thus wantonly throwing away her happiness, for I am convinced she will hereafter regret the infatuation that leads her to reject so excellent a man. She does not know her own mind, it is quite clear, and requires some kind friend to decide for her."

"Why has Cecil given this gentleman his dismissal?"

"That's really more than I can tell. She seems offended that he was not here the night

before last ; but, as I say, his property was in as much danger as hers—besides, I rather believe,—yes, I'm quite certain—that he wasn't at Langton that evening ; he had been obliged to go to ——, twenty miles off, and did not return home until two o'clock in the morning, when everything was quiet. Of course, neither he nor anybody else could have foreseen what was likely to happen, or I dare say he would have given us the benefit of his protection."

" If this be the sole cause of Mr. Wickham's failure, Miss Moubray will probably recal her refusal when she hears the real state of the case."

" I'm afraid not,—I'm very much afraid not. Miss Moubray says, she does not love him well enough to marry him ; in fact, I begin to think she never will be able to make up her mind to marry anybody, which really is very much to be lamented, for, as your lordship knows, there is nothing like wedded happiness." Lord St. Maur was silent : his experience of connubial

felicity and Mrs. Wilson's did not tally. She continued—"And as for this fancy of Miss Moubray's, that she will never marry unless she is deeply attached, it is really quite ridiculous; scarcely any one marries from attachment—at least, I'm sure I didn't, and yet poor Mr. Wilson made me an excellent husband."

"It is undoubtedly true, that, in the present state of society, both men and women are frequently obliged to sacrifice their inclinations; still, I believe, marriages of mutual affection are not impossible, although they may be rare; and assuredly if there ever did exist a woman entitled to the privilege of choice, it is Cecil Moubray."

"Yes, Miss Moubray certainly is very pretty, or rather used to be, (for she is very much gone off within the last two years; never recovered her uncle's death, I think,) and with her fortune and connexions might, I dare say, marry any one she likes,—but there's the difficulty,—she's so fastidious it's impossible to please her;

nothing but perfection will satisfy her; and where, I ask, may that be found?"

" You mean to say, then, that Miss Moubray's affections never have been interested?"

" I imagined she liked Mr. Wickham," said Mrs. Wilson, without raising her eyes from her knitting; " but as it seems I was mistaken, we can only suppose, that among the many admirers she has had, no one has succeeded in gaining her affections; nor did I ever hear her speak of any one but him in a manner which looked the least like preference; and this appears more singular, as she is so warm-hearted and affectionate a girl; but I really think she never will be in love,—unless, indeed," concluded Mrs. Wilson, with an attempt at gaiety, " we could transform Daisy into a *beau cavalier*."

" Cecil is fond of Daisy?" asked Lord St. Maur, stooping down and patting the little animal.

" Oh dear yes, quite ridiculously. Daisy, Daisy, don't be so troublesome. I'm afraid, my

lord, if you encourage him, he'll give you no peace,—he's so used to be fondled. Down, down, Daisy ! I'm quite ashamed of you. I suppose he remembers you ; he was, you know, Lady Mary's dog, and was brought, by some mistake, from Selwood ; but I dare say he behaved better when he was there. Daisy, Daisy, be quiet ! Ah ! she's coming now,—he hears her footstep."

Daisy sprang, and the Earl advanced towards the door, which opening, Cecil entered, looking so deadly pale that Mrs. Wilson began to think she had underrated her indisposition ; the next glance she obtained of Miss Moubrey's countenance confirmed this apprehension,—for, when an almost silent greeting had passed between Lord St. Maur and Cecil, and he had placed her on the sofa, had put a footstool at her feet, and so arranged the screen that it might soften, not impede, the fire's warmth, she was no longer pale ; and, terrified by this sudden transition from white to red, Mrs. Wilson became con-

vinced there was danger of ague, or intermittent fever at the very least, and insisted upon sending for medical advice without loss of time.

Cecil declined the offer, assuring her friend that her indisposition was really nothing: "she was already better, and should be quite herself after luncheon." But the luncheon hour was still distant, and Mrs. Wilson insisted on Miss Moubrey's taking some refreshment *instanter*; and after some discussion, in which Cecil (who was far from feeling any inclination for food,) pleaded for delay, some chocolate was decided on, which Mrs. Wilson, glad to make her escape, undertook to order.

For a few seconds after she had closed the door, neither of the remaining inmates of the drawing-room addressed each other. Cecil busied herself in sealing and directing her packets, and Lord St. Maur, after assisting her in lighting the taper, walked to the window, where he remained in silence.

"This will never do," thought Cecil; "he

suspects I am unwell because of his departure ; and though he evidently longs to go, thinks it would be unfeeling. I must endeavour to convince him to the contrary.” And to do this she resolved to talk with coolness of his journey. But to speak calmly when the whole frame trembles—when the chest is tightened and the blood curdles round the heart !—It was some time ere Cecil had sufficiently mastered her feelings to trust her voice, and then Lord St. Maur turned suddenly, and, throwing himself upon the footstool before her, said, in low broken accents—

“ Cecil, you once said you could not pardon the man who had prejudiced your uncle ; you told me you could never think him anything but heartless ;—is that still your feeling ? Oh, if the most tender love—if a life devoted to your happiness could atone for my unfortunate misrepresentation ! Cecil, one word—only one word—speak to me, dearest—say, say you can forgive me !”

But Cecil could not speak ; he took her passive hand—and it was not withdrawn.

The colloquies of lovers have always been famed for length : certainly no two individuals had ever half so much to talk about and explain as Cecil and her admirer ; but as such conversations are voted uninteresting to all, save the two persons most deeply concerned, and as our readers have already been behind the scenes, we will spare them the weariness of a repetition ; merely contenting ourselves with remarking that the gentleman's voice grew firmer, and his protestations of affection more impassioned, as he perceived he was heard with pleasure ; and that although the lady chose neither to acknowledge how much or how long she had loved him, Lord St. Maur was perfectly satisfied. And so was Mrs. Wilson, who in due time returned, bearing the chocolate ; and, perceiving that Miss Moubrey was a good deal agitated, and the Earl far from calm, became convinced he had, according to her suggestion, taken Mr.

Wickham's cause in hand, and the marriage would take place after all ; and, when the truth was fully revealed to her, coupled with the information that an annuity would be settled on her, that a very pretty cottage on the property also was at her service, provided she liked to remain in the neighbourhood, her happiness was indeed complete. And there the good lady may be seen in the present day, busy to her heart's content, overlooking the schools, making soup, cutting out clothes for the poor people, and occasionally paying an inquisitorial visit to the Hall, where Mrs. Mason no longer reigns, she having been dismissed in a very summary manner on the same day that witnessed so happy a change in the prospects of her too credulous mistress.

But even on this day of happiness and unanimity of feeling, there did arise on one subject a difference of opinion between Cecil and Lord St. Maur, which occurring so soon after their reconciliation might have appeared to some

persons as boding ill for the harmony of their future lives. The advocates for female sway, especially, may be of this opinion, and think that Lord St. Maur shewed neither affection nor gallantry in hesitating to accede to Cecil's first request; and she, a terrible deficiency of female spirit in not insisting on his acquiescence. The fact was this: without much reflection, Miss Moubray proposed that Mary should be immediately transferred from Lady Newrystown's to Mrs. Hartfield's care;—she dreaded Eleanor's influence. Lord St. Maur looked vexed.

“If you really wish it, my own Cecil,” he replied, “it shall of course be done; still I think Eleanor ——”

But Cecil would not suffer him to finish. Hardly had she spoken before she saw the cruelty of thus unnecessarily wounding the feelings of her former rival. And to this concession, probably, she owed not a little of the unbounded influence she ever after exercised

over her once intractable guardian ; for, delighted with her ready compliance, Lord St. Maur was convinced that, in addition to her one thousand and one other good qualities, Cecil Moubrey was the gentlest being in the world.

During the course of my narrative, it has often been Lady Emily's lot to be exceedingly surprised ; but never had her ladyship's astonishment reached the pitch it did on the receipt of a letter from her brother, announcing his intended marriage, and requesting her immediate presence at Eldersleigh. "It was the strangest, most unlooked for thing !—it passed her powers of comprehension." And amongst all the most extraordinary motives sometimes supposed to influence people upon like occasions, there was not one that could in any way explain to Lady Emily how it happened that Lord St. Maur and Cecil, who always disliked each other, —who, ever since their first becoming acquainted, had done nothing but quarrel, should,

after all, make such a finale. It was impossible to account for it, and Lady Emily was all impatience to hear the real truth.

“ Pray, mamma,” said Louisa, who, since the separation from her husband, resided with Lady Emily, “ do you mean to go ?”

“ Certainly, Louisa, I’m dying to hear all about it;—so very strange; I declare, I can’t believe it yet. Besides, although I fear the marriage is not likely to turn out very happily, I should be very sorry to vex my brother by not being at the wedding, particularly after what he says about increasing my income.”

“ I am not included in the invitation.”

“ Perhaps the omission is only accidental,” replied her mother; very doubtfully, however.

“ Oh, no; the slight is intentional,—I am not good enough for Miss Moubrey. It is wonderful how correct some people are ! I must, however, confess, I think that a girl who can be the means of making a man break his faith with

another woman is not exactly the person to give herself these airs."

"Perhaps there was no engagement after all. I never much believed it, to say the truth," answered Lady Emily, quite forgetting she had been the principal person who had given currency to the report.

And had Lord St. Maur indeed broken faith with Eleanor? By no means; he had never entertained the slightest intention of marrying her, nor had he given her any reason to expect he would. Her going abroad, and fixing herself at Naples, so far from being the result of a preconcerted plan between them, was a source of very great annoyance to him.

The wedding, which, on Mary's account, took place shortly after the éclaircissement, was unattended by éclat or parade. Elizabeth Hartfield and Miss Middleton, who acted as bride's-maids, were the only persons present not immediately connected with either party. Sir Thomas

gave away the bride, in consequence of Lord Ashford's not being able to leave his dying lady. The service was most impressively performed, not by the pompous Dr. Styleigh, but by the mild, unostentatious Bishop of —. And never have those solemn vows been breathed with greater truth ; nor has there often been a prouder, happier husband, nor a more tenderly confiding wife.

To the curious in female attire, it may not be uninteresting to learn that Cecil, on this memorable morning, wore the veil which had hitherto been so carefully secluded in the drawer of her writing-desk. A few days were spent at Selwood, and, after a brief halt in town, they set off for Italy.

And Cecil's heart beats high with happiness ; Mary is in her arms,—Mary, taller, paler, more aristocratic looking, but the same warm-hearted, guileless child. There, too, is Carry, smiling through her tears ; and Eleanor ? She had left

Naples a few days back, in consequence, she affirmed, of news from home.

The spring and summer passed blissfully. Mary gained strength; and each succeeding day gave additional stability to Cecil's newborn felicity. Still, surrounded as she was by the choicest blessings,—with love, with friendship, with affection, gilding her path, and winging onwards the light sunny hours, there were yet moments when the shadow of her recollections became darkened,—for Wickham was not, could not be, forgotten. Neither was Lord St. Maur altogether exempt from uneasiness; for while all the affections of his heart hourly entwined themselves more closely round the treasure now entirely his own, and all his dearest wishes had been realized, he could not see without regret, that, notwithstanding Mary's almost perfect recovery, Cecil expressed no inclination to return to England; on the contrary, when he spoke of leaving Naples, she pleaded for delay;

and calling to mind how highly she had formerly extolled the Continent, he feared the revival of old feelings and predilections. But Henry Armstrong, so long her evil genius, did at length perform a very friendly office, and one for which she ever after remained most truly grateful. To the astonishment of everybody, to the excessive indignation of Lord St. Maur, scarcely had the years of customary mourning for her deceased lord expired, when Lady Newrystown became the gallant captain's wife. From that time, all Cecil's reluctance to return to England vanished ; she no longer dreaded the vicinity to Firgrove.

Sophy Wilmot heard of her former lover's marriage without a single pang, for settled indifference had long superseded the attachment she had formerly entertained for him. She remains, however, still unmarried ; and in spite of her friends' wishes that she would select one of the many aspirants for her hand, by whom, as a pretty, wealthy young woman, she is surrounded,

there is every probability she will add another to the list of victims to parental prudence, or rather, perhaps, *selfishness*. For, notwithstanding all that is said and written on the subject of parental love, I do believe that, in establishing their children, parents think quite as much, if not more, of their own aggrandizement than of the real welfare of their offspring. Had the marriage been suffered to take place, as was originally intended, before Henry's roving habits had become so inveterate, it might have proved happy; for he was good-tempered, free from glaring vice, and at that time sincerely attached to Sophy. But in consequence of his altered circumstances, a considerable pecuniary sacrifice must have been made, and at this subtraction from their income the Wilmots demurred,—for what was the gratification of their child's wishes compared with the diminution of those luxuries and comforts habit and long use had rendered necessary to their happiness? Such were their real motives for breaking off the marriage, though

they, perhaps, were not aware of it; still less did the world at large observe anything reprehensible in Mrs. Wilmot's conduct; on the contrary, it was called prudent, wise, judicious,—such as any mother, actuated by a due regard for her daughter's interest, would have adopted. "Sophy, it was true, felt the disappointment keenly, but that would pass off; she would see somebody she liked better, and Armstrong would be forgotten."

Thus reasoned a large circle of acquaintances and friends,—but they were widely wrong; her young affections, crushed in their early bloom, refused again to brighten her existence. There is scarcely any point upon which persons should be more wary of interfering than that upon which the happiness of a whole life so materially depends: it is easy to talk of getting over an attachment,—of forming a second preference; but every woman's love is not like thistle-down, ready to take root in any soil to which the wind may chance to bear it; and although a girl may,

without difficulty, be talked out of a marriage, it does not unfrequently happen that, in thus submitting to the wishes of her family, she, like Sophy Wilmot, extinguishes the lamp whose gladsome ray might have directed, cheered, and brightened her path in after life.

Through Lord St. Maur's interest, Mr. Hartfield obtained a far better appointment. And, from the same quarter, Francis Munday enjoys a living of six hundred a year, situated at no great distance from Selwood; his mother still resides with him, and, a delighted witness of her son's active usefulness, and the affection mutually existing between him and the people committed to his charge, no longer regrets her having suffered him to devote himself to the ministry. Report says, that the very pretty parsonage-house, completely, and even elegantly, furnished under Lady St. Maur's directions, is shortly to receive its last embellishment, in the shape of a lady-like, well-educated, well-principled, well-chosen wife.

Edward Wickham had been less hurt by Cecil's refusal than might have been supposed ; because, fully aware of the state of her mind,—knowing that she cherished towards him no sentiment beyond esteem or friendship, it was, in fact, hardly a disappointment ; nor was he altogether without expectation that time and perseverance would eventually accomplish all he wished. But her marriage, while it accounted for his failure, gave a death-blow to his hopes, and, for a season, he remained plunged in despondency. It seldom, however, happens that a man who has made one offer (whether from pique, anger, or that, having determined upon playing Benedict, he thinks one Beatrice will do quite as well as another) fails to repeat it ; and I hope our fair readers will not think less favourably of Wickham, when, in accordance with my duty as an historian, I inform them that he was no exception to the remark. During the following spring he met Miss Hartfield repeatedly ; and though at first he sought her society rather

for the sake of past times and feelings, still it was not in his nature, nor, perhaps, in the nature of any man similarly circumstanced, to remain long insensible to the preference she evidently felt for him. His offer was joyfully accepted ; and, married to a woman of small fortune and common-place attainments, but whose affection for her husband borders on enthusiasm, he is, in all probability, happier than had he become the husband of the more richly-gifted Cecil Moubray.

Miss Stout (does the reader bear in mind the poor artist who made so unfortunate a *début* in Lord St. Maur's drawing-room ?) still plies her most unprofitable craft,—taking miniatures when she finds persons willing to be made frights of, and giving lessons in landscape-painting when pupils can be met with : during the annual visit of the St. Maur family to town, Mary ranks among the latter ; and, notwithstanding his lady's remonstrances, Lord St. Maur once thought proper to enrol himself

among the first. Vanity is said to have some share in the encouragement given to portrait painters ; but most assuredly, if in this instance the remark holds good, the Earl has little cause for self-congratulation ; for though highly delighted at the honour thus conferred, Miss Stout's original nervousness returned with such force that she found it difficult even to steal a glance at her noble sitter,—and a caricature resemblance is the fruit of her labour.

She would have repeated the experiment, but Lord St. Maur thought he had endured enough ; the picture has been placed in a certain spacious apartment at Selwood Castle, where it serves as a pendant to the miniature formerly taken by the same painter ; and both afford considerable amusement to a young gentleman who has latterly usurped Lady Mary's place upon her father's knee, and to a little Cecil Moubray, Baron Eldersleigh, who, despite his fair hair and laughing deep-blue eyes, sometimes gives very unequivocal proof of his

being a descendant of the choleric old lord. Lady St. Maur spends much of her time in that room, although it is exceedingly noisy; indeed, I have no reason to believe she has yet discovered any specific through whose agency “people can keep their children quiet.”

William Beauclerc no longer renders himself so pre-eminently disagreeable towards our heroine: she has persuaded her husband to remit his debt, and thus conferred a favour which even his selfish nature can appreciate; and he feels something like gratitude towards the noble-minded creature who, in the true spirit of Christianity, has thus requited good for evil.

Sir Thomas Warham spends more of his time at Selwood than even formerly; indeed Lord St. Maur sometimes feels his visits both too frequent and too long; particularly as the Baronet is becoming liable to attacks of gout, when no one but his old favourite the Countess can nurse him to his entire satisfaction. And as, in order to reconcile her husband to this

interruption to their social enjoyments, Cecil reminds him of the forlorn discomfort of their old friend's bachelor home, the Earl has more than once terrified the sister exceedingly by the strenuous manner in which he advises Sir Thomas to take a wife.

Lady Emily still talks, still wonders, still wants money ; for in spite of a handsome addition to her income at the period of her brother's marriage, her own bad management and Louisa's extravagance involve her in perpetual difficulties : she is, in fact, one of those persons who, let their pecuniary resources be ever so abundant, are always poor. Lord St. Maur looks grave at her repeated demands for assistance, and talks of "younger children ;" but a word from Cecil (perhaps he only waited for that coaxing word), and the draft is written.

Nor is his bounty limited to Lady Emily ; for, notwithstanding a proper respect for the dignity of station, although exercising a due regard for his children's interest, Lord St.

Maur, naturally liberal, and now influenced by the highest motives, tastes no purer pleasure than to spread far and wide the stream of his benevolence.

Would that his example were more generally followed—that among the many who advocate the necessity of *living* according to their means, some at least might be found who acknowledged an equal necessity for *giving* according to their means,—that those who wear the fine linen and purple of this world, and fare sumptuously every day, would, in the midst of their abundance, think of the wants of their less favoured brethren,—that the parents who, under pretence of a provision for their offspring, cloak their own love of gold, would but remember that “covetousness, which is idolatry,” is among those things for which God will call them into judgment.

Reader, in conclusion, one last word ; for amidst the many censures passed upon the numerous faults discovered in this work, (to all

of which, believe me, you are not more sensible than I,) there will perhaps be one objection raised that I would fain reply to. You complain that too frequent a recurrence has been made to serious subjects, and allege, that, in taking up a work of fiction, you sought to be amused, not lectured ; you expected something gay and lively, not a sermon in every second page. Nor did I intend that you should find one there ; and if I have been led more than once to touch on subjects of a serious nature, it is because I hold these topics to be too all-important ever to be entirely passed by—that as, to fit ourselves for eternity, is, or should be, the one great object of our lives during our pilgrimage below, in speaking of our feelings, motives, interests, to religion must a fitting station be assigned,—not the religion of romance, of sensibility, of a diseased imagination—not the religion of the pharisee or formalist—but that which springs from God, and leads to God—which renews our hearts, pervades our thoughts,

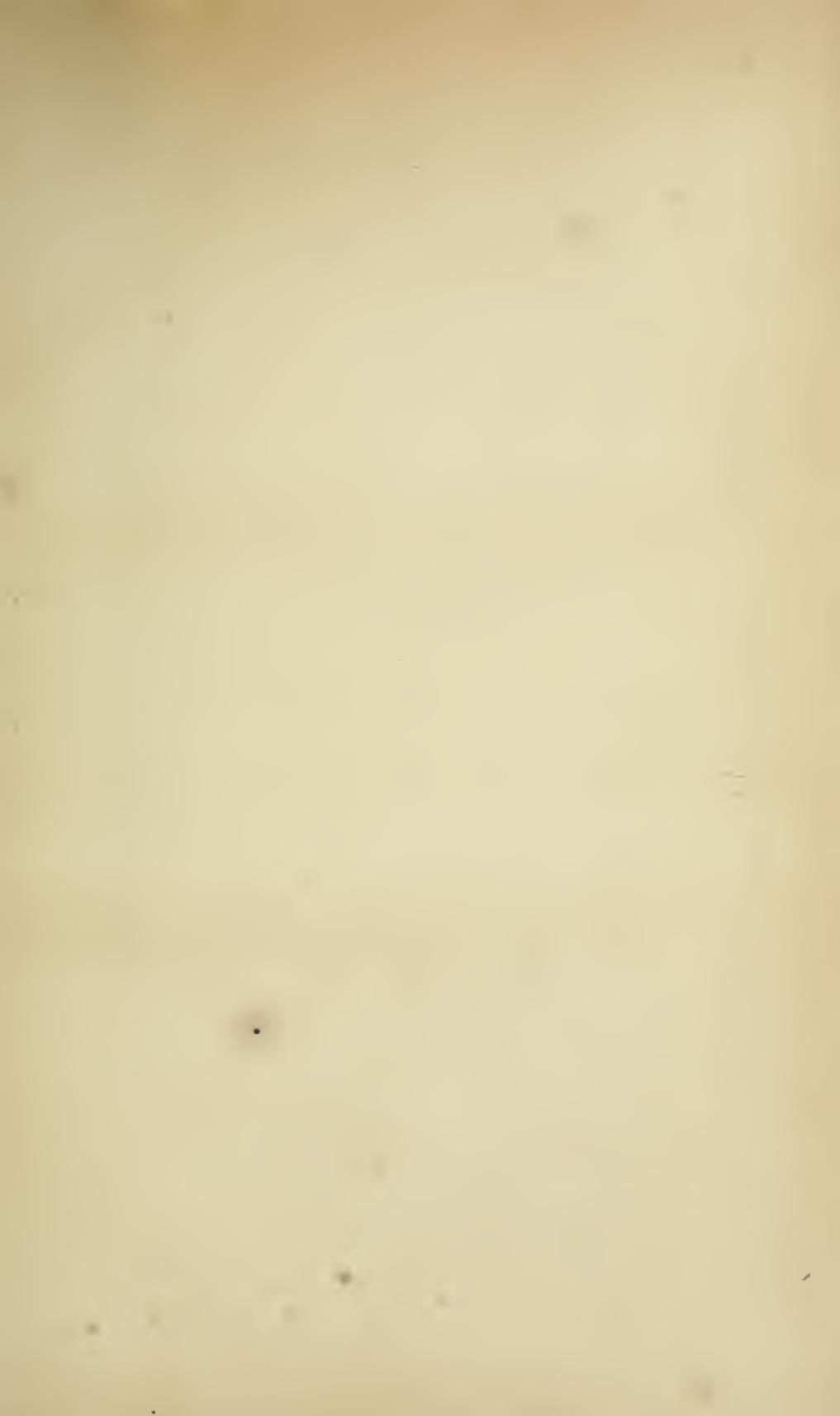
and regulates each action of our lives,—not a mere mass of speculative notions, nor false enthusiasm; but that faith that works by love—that charity which suffereth long, and yet is kind,—that hope which maketh not ashamed, for it rests, not on our own imperfect goodness, but on the all-sufficient merits of our great Prophet, Priest, and King.

“I have called this tale “Misrepresentation;” but in writing it, my object has principally been, to endeavour to portray some of the evil consequences of Pride. Perhaps, strictly speaking, Pride should not be ranked among the passions; at any rate, I have more than once felt doubts upon the subject; but, to say the truth, without an affectation of pedantry, I knew no better term to use.

Should it be urged that the features of that evil propensity might have been more strongly marked—its workings more forcibly displayed—its consequences more appalling—I can only answer, that, mistrusting my unpractised hand,

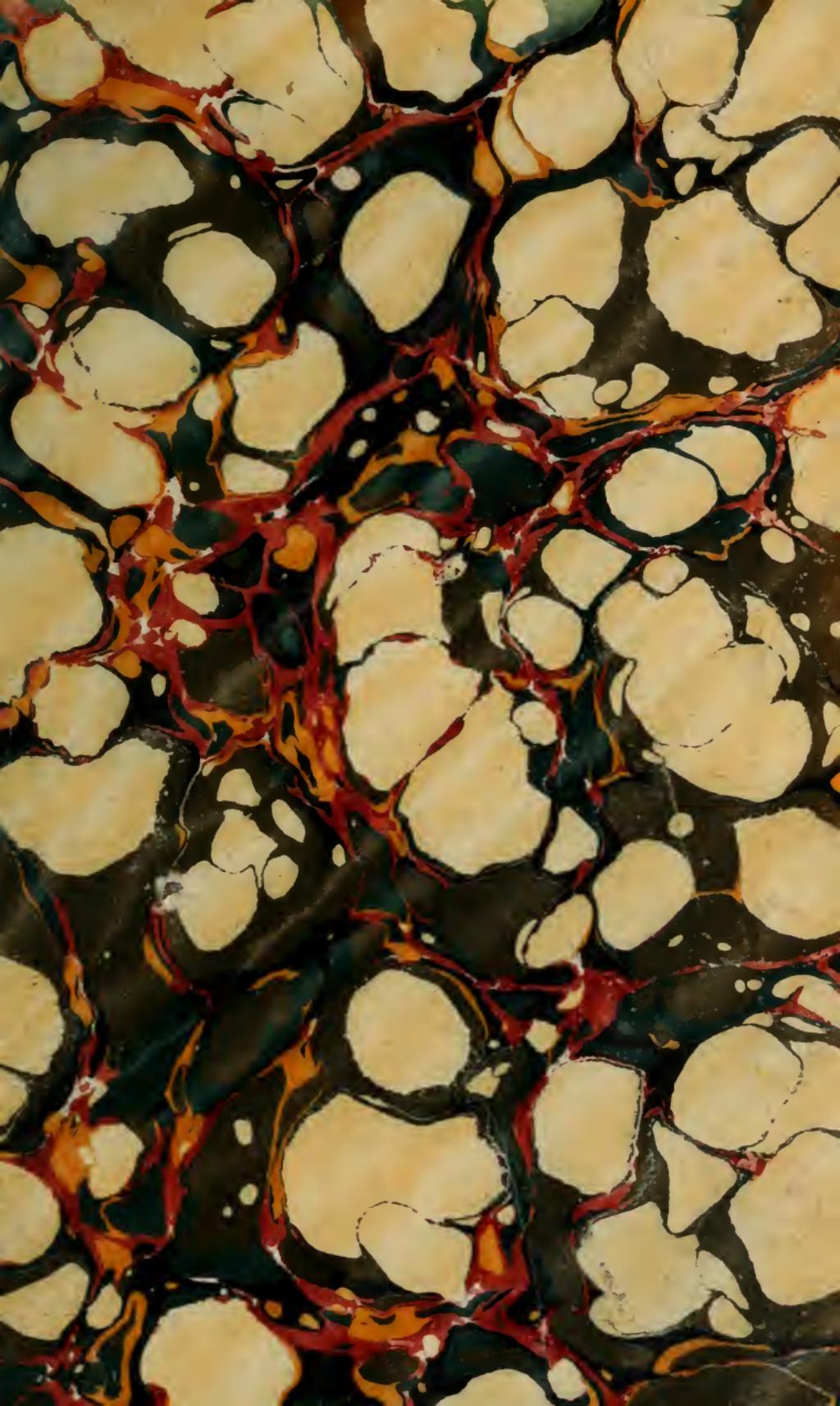
I have been fearful, lest, instead of a strong likeness, I should produce a caricature. But granting this, I would still hope I have said enough to prove how much of guilt and sorrow may have their origin from Pride. Farewell, then, gentle reader; should we meet again, "ENVY" will be the theme.

THE END.









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